THE FUTURE OF INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

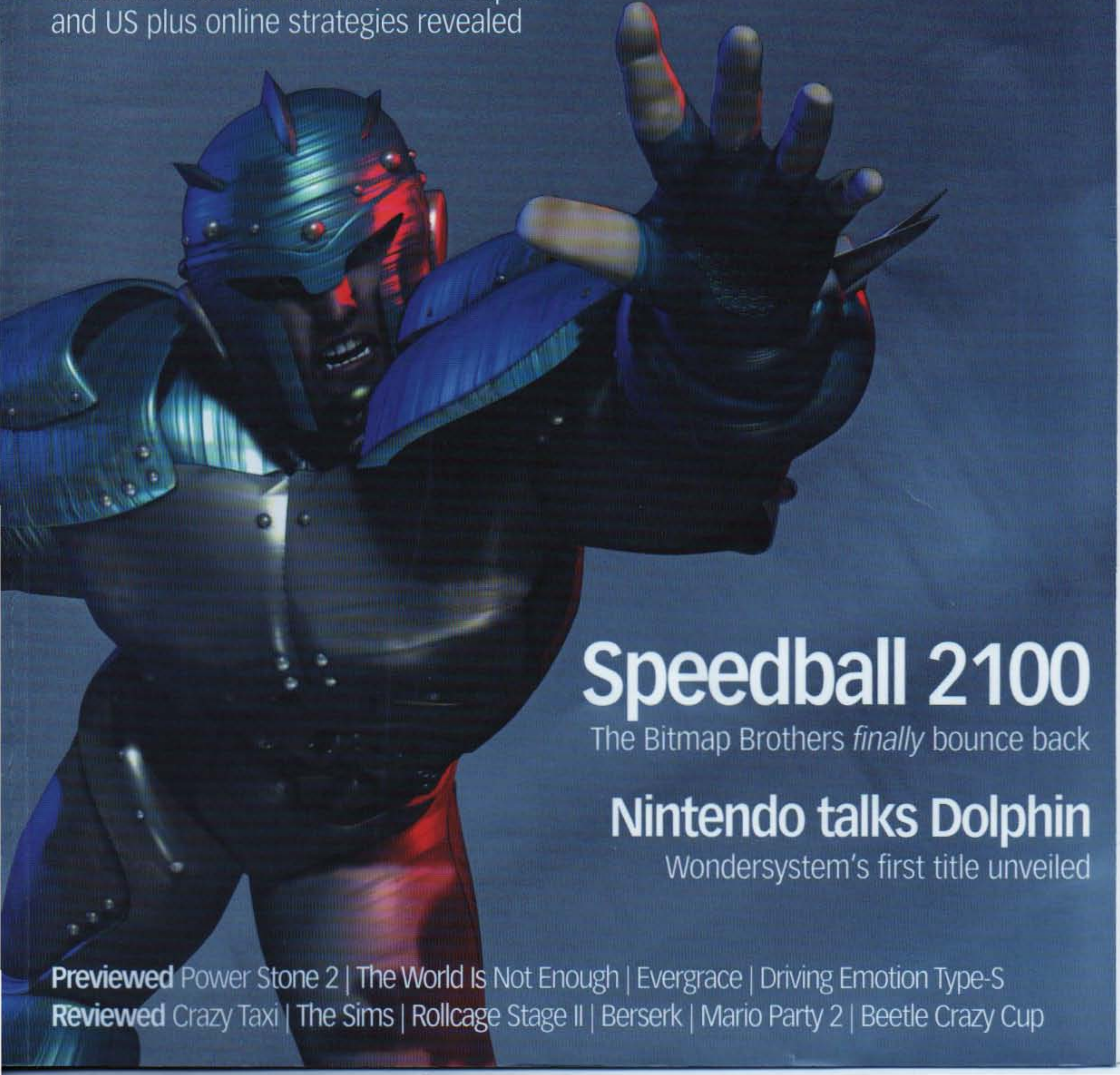
UK EDITION MARCH 2000 £3.50 ®

EDGE

DREAMCAST ■ PLAYSTATION ■ PS2 ■ N64 ■ PC ■ COIN-OP ■ ONLINE

PS2 prepares for lift-off

Exclusive: hottest new titles from Japan and US plus online strategies revealed



Speedball 2100

The Bitmap Brothers *finally* bounce back

Nintendo talks Dolphin

Wondersystem's first title unveiled

Previewed Power Stone 2 | The World Is Not Enough | Evergrace | Driving Emotion Type-S

Reviewed Crazy Taxi | The Sims | Rollcage Stage II | Berserk | Mario Party 2 | Beetle Crazy Cup



If someone offered you the opportunity to go and watch a football match on a Saturday afternoon, only with the pitch markings redrawn and the rules turned upside down, you'd be forgiven for returning to your pint of beer or the lawnmower. In the same way football aficionados balked at America's request to turn it from a game of two halves into one of four quarters (to allow for TV ad breaks) when the nation hosted the World Cup in 1994, fans do not take kindly to rules being tinkered with. No, rules exist for a purpose. And that's one of the chief reasons why videogames that attempt to invent new sports – future sports, as they like to be termed – so frequently, and spectacularly, crash and burn.

But not *Speedball II*, the Bitmap Brothers' finest moment. Here was a game somehow capable of writing a new rule book that hundreds of thousands of 16bit computer gamers would come to learn, play by, and worship. But that was some ten years ago.

In an industry groaning under the oppressive weight of franchises and sequels, perhaps the biggest surprise concerning *Speedball II* is that it's taken so long for the concept to be given another run out on the pitch. But this month one of **Edge**'s correspondents became the first person outside of The Bitmaps to sample high-speed silver-ball sports action in its 2000 (or rather '2100') guise. The report on p34 should serve to ease the minds of those as anxious to see the developer's new work doing justice to the original as they are their favoured football team performing well in the cup.

Speaking of cups, **Edge** is handing out its annual awards this month (see p54). If only there was a most-anticipated sequel category, there would surely be only one title in the running...



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Colour reproduction

Pre-Press, Bath
Phoenix Repro, Bath

Print

Cradley Print, Warley, West Midlands
Edge is printed on Royal Press 90gsm

Production of Edge

Hardware Power Macintosh, G3, G4, i-Book, iMac, Quadra by Apple
Software *QuarkXPress*, Adobe *Photoshop*, Macromedia *FreeHand*, Pixar *Typestry* and Nisus *Writer*
Typography (Adobe®)
Formata light/**regular**/**medium**/**bold**
Vectora light/**bold/black** Base12Sans/**bold**/Univers Ultra Condensed

Fifth colour Pantone® cover 877 / feature 8420

Special thanks Michiko Maezawa

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Media with Passion

Bath London **Milan** Munich **New York** Paris **San Francisco**

Printed in the UK

ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation)



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TESTSCREEN

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CRAZY TAXI
ROLLCAGE STAGE II
BEETLE CRAZY CUP
BERSERK
MARIO PARTY 2

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EA brings back Bond, Capcom unearths a new precious stone, Rare prepares for glory

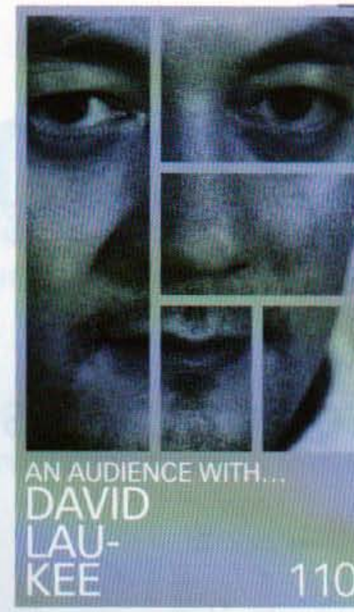
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Awards 2000 54



Edge salutes the cream of the crop from the last 12 months of interactive entertainment development



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Cutting Edge

The latest news from the world of interactive entertainment

SQUARE UNVEILS ONLINE FUTURE AS PS2 LAUNCH NEARS

Japanese superpublisher turns fortunes to wide-ranging new Internet service, confirms three new *Final Fantasy* titles







Open to both trade and public, Square's Millennium event in Yokohama attracted thousands

Square CEO Tomoyuki Takechi headed up the Millennium conference, which sent noises through the game industry



Most attendees were keener to get a taste of *FFIX* than they were Square's online strategies

SquareSoft has announced an ambitious and far-reaching new service entitled Play Online, to be launched in Japan in 2001. The network is expected to bring Japanese gamers something far more challenging than anything yet attempted by a videogame publisher.

The project was made the star of the Square Millennium conference held in Yokohama, Japan. Stunned attendees heard how Play Online is being created to transform the *Final Fantasy* series into an Internet RPG. It will enable a three-title transition – *Final Fantasy IX*, released on PlayStation in Japan this summer, will be the last purely standalone RPG; *Final Fantasy X* and *XI* (due out in spring and winter 2001 respectively) will be PlayStation2 titles, optimised for the new Play Online service.

And the plans for Play Online extend far beyond games. Full e-commerce facilities will allow users to browse virtual bookstores and records shops complete with 3D merchandise. It will be possible to buy and download music









Play Online project director Sakaguchi Hironobu (above left) evangelised Square's network plans, while Motomiya Hiroshi (above centre), creator of legendary Japanese manga strip 'Salaryman Kintaro', lent his weight to the ambitious initiative



Debug PlayStation2 consoles powered a number of demos at the Millennium event

via the service. There's even talk about live concerts being broadcast across the Play Online network. Comics and news reports will be made available online, too.

Two manga series, *Slam Dunk* and *Kintaro*, have already been confirmed. Play Online's prototype interface looks stunning – fully animated with a beguiling aquatic theme, simpler and prettier than most western efforts.

Foremost, the service is a skeleton to support the persistent online world that the *Final Fantasy* series will become – other games will follow via the system. Once you have logged on to Play Online, fellow gamers will be able to locate you throughout the network – even if you're not playing a game. Instant messaging will enable Play Online users to call up friends to join them in battle.

Some publishers have discretely avoided going online for fear of losing gamers to the other attractions of the Net. This is Square's method of gaining from both aspects.

Square is also developing its own Internet browser for PlayStation2, PC and mobile devices which will be accessible within Play Online. It will also look to bring the outside world into its network. In Yokohama, company executives talked of players looking up the results of sporting events with Play Online and then downloading facsimiles of the encounters into sports games. They could then replay recent match-ups on their own machines – perhaps even changing the result for their favoured side.

Other facilities provided by Play Online include chat, email, a calendar and a personal organiser. Given the rapid take-up of WAP mobile phone devices in Japan, it's no surprise that the system will also interface with devices such as Palm Pilot and mobile phones.

The e-distribution and e-commerce features will be the responsibility of Square's subsidiary, DigiCube, with Square's 3D experts taking care of the visual

The *Final Fantasy* series will become Play Online's first Internet RPG. Plans for the service extend far beyond games. Full e-commerce will allow users to browse bookstores, record shops and maybe even view live concerts









Square subsidiary DigiCube will handle e-distribution and e-commerce, which will expand the potential of Play Online beyond gaming and into the wider market, covering shopping, music, sport, and online comics, etc

How it works



A short movie previewed at the Square Millennium event gave a taste of what Square imagines gamers will be doing in December 2001. A young Japanese boy and a girl switch on a PlayStation2, linked up to a 19-inch flat-screen TFT display. Play Online appears and they fire off a few emails before indulging in a spot of realtime chat.

They elect to play *Final Fantasy XI*. The movie continues with the two young gamers in action. Enemies soon thwart progress through the hi-res 3D *Zelda*-style world and the need for reinforcements becomes clear. The young girl phones a friend. He is near an Internet café. He loads up *Final Fantasy XI*. Because the *Final Fantasy XI* world is persistent and the friend saved his last game far from the other two players, he has no choice but to run to their assistance. In real time.

While waiting, they amuse themselves with a few of the other facilities offered by Play Online. The girl is content to watch the latest sports news. The boy buys some music from Square's record shop, downloading it. He then reads a digital manga comic called 'Slam Dunk' which he buys from a Square newsagent.

At last, the third player arrives at the rendezvous point. Above their heads he sees speech bubbles which show their preoccupations. He knocks on their bodies to attract their attention and they quit to rejoin the game. Then the three go off to battle.










While Square's Millennium celebrations gathered steam, several PS2 developments came to light, including a delay for Polyphony's *GT2000* (top left) – the game will now ship in Japan in the autumn. Meanwhile, Namco's *Tekken Tag Tournament* (top row, second) has been pushed back from launch to March 30. 'Safer' options, such as *O Story* (above left), *Stepping Stage* (above, second), *Fantavision* (above, third), *All Star Professional Wrestling Ring* (top, third) and *Gekikokan Pro Baseball* (top right) will happily make it for March 4, however. Most early PS2 titles will ship on CD-ROM, but titles such as *Onimusha* (above right) may use DVD's potential

presentation of the merchandise itself.

Square has also teamed up with NTT Communications Corporation of the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation Group. Details of this partnership have yet to be revealed. Square may wish to have its own fast, broadband network distinct from the Internet, similar to that pioneered by British Telecom's Wireplay service.

With game sales down in Japan, companies such as Sega, Capcom, Nintendo and SNK have all announced that they are looking at online development, but Square's upcoming service remains unique and seems certain to enter into head-to-head competition with Sony's own proposed PlayStation2 network.

In the west, proprietary networks such as MSN and AOL have eventually become portals to the Internet, and this could be the inevitable route that game networks go in Japan. If Square's model works, expect its unique elements (see 'How it works') to be borrowed here.

Following the rapid take-up of WAP mobile phone technology in Japan, the system will interface with devices such as Palm Pilot and mobiles, while e-distribution and e-commerce will be taken care of by DigiCube

Fantasy's future




It might seem incredible to hear SquareSoft speak of *Final Fantasy XI*, but the roadmap actually reveals little about the future game's content. And no significant new details have been confirmed about *The Bouncer*, *Racing Emotion Type-S* (see p24) or any of its other eagerly awaited PlayStation2 titles.

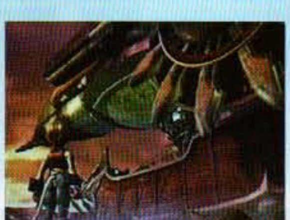
Final Fantasy IX (shown here) is another outing for the *FFVIII* engine, but many gamers will be pleased to see the series return to its kawai roots with more fantasy-style graphics. The CGI movies are as stunning as ever, hinting at an aerial world embroiled in dragon warfare. More details should come at the Tokyo Game Show this month.



Square has said that *Final Fantasy X* will be set in a free-roaming, realtime 3D world. As in the pre-*FFIX* games, multiple characters in a team will be absorbed into the team leader's body and reappear for battles. *Final Fantasy X* will be compatible with Play Online's more basic networking features. *Final Fantasy XI*, subtitled *Online Another World*, will essentially be a fully online version of *Final Fantasy X* but with massive multiplayer capabilities and featuring many of the creatures and characters from its previous titles.



Square has also given a sneak glimpse of the upcoming 'Final Fantasy' movie. Looking somewhat akin to 'The Matrix', it underscores Square's mastery of distinctive CG-generated animation.



DOLPHIN POISED TO STEAL **PS2 THUNDER?**

Is Nintendo planning 128bit hardware revelations as Sony readies for Japanese market?

Speculation is growing that Nintendo will unveil its next-generation Dolphin hardware in the next few weeks – as a spoiler for the launch of Sony's PlayStation2.

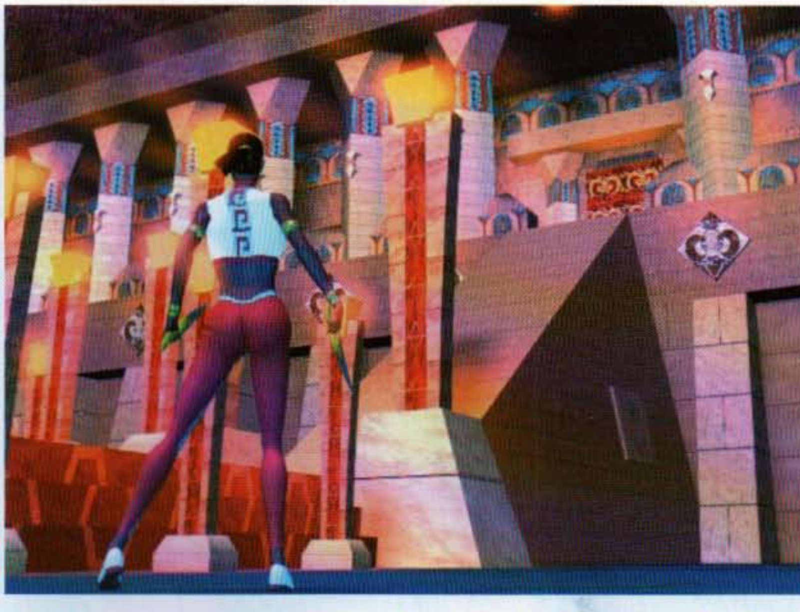
Development sources in the US suggest Nintendo will begin by announcing the full specifications for the new system's RAM, audio and storage capabilities. The CPU is being custom made by IBM, with graphics chips designed by Silicon Valley-based ArtX and manufactured by NEC.

PlayStation2 goes on sale on March 4 in Japan, and Nintendo could wait five days before revealing Dolphin at San Jose's Game Developer Conference – although it has no real presence reserved at the Sega-dominated event. More likely is a big announcement at a special event on home turf, with key industry figures romanced throughout February.

The biggest issue is software. Rare is providing rearguard support for the N64, and in the west, Retro Studios, NST, Left Field Studios, Midway, Acclaim and Rare are all known to be working on Dolphin titles. Retro is concentrating on development tools, Midway is understood to have as many as half a dozen titles in development, while Acclaim has signed up to produce a launch title. LucasArts, meanwhile, has said it is in the process of evaluating the platform.

Nintendo has traditionally put software first, delaying the launch of the N64 to finish *Super Mario 64*. It rarely pushes misleading or rushed software on its audience, and Dolphin will be no different. "I don't like showing demos that are not games," admits **Jim Merrick**, software engineering manager of Nintendo US. "Not to cast aspersions on Sony's 'Ducky in a Bathtub', which I thought was really cute, but it doesn't tell you much about the system as a machine. I'd rather wait and show you a game."

Despite the N64's decline as a credible gaming platform over the past 12 months, Nintendo remains confident. Executive vice president of sales and marketing **Peter Main** told stock market analysts in January that Nintendo was watching and learning from the efforts of Sony and Sega. "Coming last in a launch, you know the ducks you're shooting at," he said.



Created using the developer's own SAGE middleware, *Saffire* is targeting PS2 as well as Dolphin. The shots on this page give an idea of what the developer believes Nintendo's console can do

"I don't like showing demos that are not games. Not to cast aspersions on Sony's 'Ducky in a Bathtub', which I thought was really cute, but it doesn't say much about the system"

Nintendo and NEC's joint £1.8bn RAM and graphics fabrication facility is planned to be running by summer. Any delay in finalising a strategy would point at the moribund Japanese market, where a 20-year affair with conventional games software seems to have ended.

The answer from Sega and Sony is to centre plans on the Net – which is sure to chill Nintendo, not least given the ongoing saga of the blundered 64DD. Kyoto seems more likely to look towards the successful *Pokémon* and gaps left at the younger end of the market by its competitors for its future hardware.

THE FACE OF DOLPHIN?

Despite Nintendo's woeful reputation with thirdparty developers, the success of the N64's early supporters, such as Acclaim and THQ – and the sheer mass of competition on Sony's machine – makes Dolphin a tempting platform to work on. But with a global rollout of full-strength Dolphin development kits not expected for at least another two months, and no word on the target system, smaller developers are finding it hard to get started. Little-known developer Saffire Corporation has several Dolphin games in production, ranging from a firstperson shooter to a thirdperson action romp, *Saffire*. Without development kits, developers must estimate the power of the target system – a notoriously unreliable practice. These exclusive screenshots (left) come from an early prototype of *Saffire*. AI and inverse kinetics are highlights of the technology.







Not much can be learned from what's really just one developer's early stab at predicting the final performance of the system. If Nintendo wants to avoid the software drought that plagued the N64 from inception and now looks likely to finish it off, thirdparty support must become an immediate priority.

ATEI: SEQUELS AND INNOVATION POWER COIN-OP INDUSTRY

Fewer games shown than last year, but originality from the likes of Sega and Taito eases some concerns









Konami's hardware (main) was swamped at ATEI, while Sega introduced two coin-ops, *Sega Marine Fishing* (top left) and *Brave Fire Fighters* (top right), to the UK. The mediocre *Rolling X-Treme* (above)







Subtlety wasn't a strength of *Photo Punch 2000*, which took the theme of *Sonic Blast Man* further by printing out images of your battered visage

Some outstanding new games shone through at the recent Amusement Trades Exhibition International (ATEI) show in London. This year's trade-only event featured less coin-ops than 1999, but still offered a concentration of new machines from several companies, with Sega, Namco, Konami, Gaelco, Taito, Midway and Atari all present.

There was no shortage of arcade talent as punters were offered a glimpse of the international coin-ops about to be introduced into European arcades. A line of eight Atari/Midway aural punisher *Off Road Thunder* cabinets deserved to take the multiplayer driving experience crown from the more realistic end of the market, represented by Sega's *Ferrari F355 Challenge Twin*. In other areas, Namco's *World Kicks* was eclipsed by the superior graphics and gameplay of Gaelco's *Football Power*, and a rash of multiplayer firstperson shooters were kicked into touch by the gruesome speed-fragging of *Spawn*.

Sega teased visitors with a badly lit screen showing a videotape preview of the *Star Wars: Episode I Racer*. R&D#5's fourplayer creation looked stunning, but with a European release pencilled in for March, a playable version was expected. More exciting was a trio of kits from Taito, its *Landing High Japan* flight sim, an unnamed train driving game, and *Power Shovel Simulator* impressing those who made the













Highlights at ATEI came in the form of (by column, left to right) Konami's *Fatal Judgement: Silent Scope 2*, Sega's *Eighteen Wheeler*, and Taito's *Landing High Japan*. It was no surprise to see dedicated-cabinet titles win out





Namco's *World Kicks* was beaten to the sports title crown by the surprisingly fun *Football Power* from Gaelco (above)

effort to dig them out. Away from the standard arcade revelations, both Sega and Konami offered Web registration for high scores, to determine world rankings.

Virtual reality strikes back

Equally innovative was the $16,000 GVR VR Vortek virtual reality kit. The company claimed the boom-mounted display, with a large hydraulic system suspending the kit around a player's head and hands, resolved the problems of previous headmounted display units. The unit, running PC title *Heavy Gear II*, offered an intense experience, the 360-degree movement creating a sense of immersion without nausea. Perhaps the arcade, with its propensity for shorter games, is the place for the problematic VR method of gameplay.

More traditional offerings included *Fatal Judgement: Silent Scope 2*, and Konami's small, cramped enclosure demonstrating it was crammed with onlookers. Set in and around a CG model of London's Tower Bridge, this sequel copied the sharp-shooting, claustrophobic gameplay of the original and looks set to continue last year's headshot trend.

While the Konami stand rang to the sound of caps being popped, release-hungry Dreamcast fans mobbed the Sega stand for views of potential conversion material.



***Eighteen Wheeler* (above) and *Landing High Japan* (top) were among the most demanding games**

With such a large amount of interest, **Paul Williams**, Sega Amusement's sales director, stressed that conversions of arcade titles are being considered, but still not guaranteed, from boards other than Naomi.

"The Hikaru board may be used because of the control system required, which of course would have to be reconfigured before conversion for any home system," he said. Dreamcast owners may take that as a hint that arcade titles such as *Star Wars: Episode I Racer*, *Emergency Call Ambulance* and *Brave Fire Fighters* may eventually make an appearance on their consoles.

On the whole, this year's ATEI offered up few surprises, but it at least served to reiterate that creativity in the coin-op sector is, fortunately, far from being exhausted.





Midway followed up its popular *Hydro Thunder* with *Off Road Thunder* (left), a less-than-serious racer which, in link-up mode, proved strangely compelling. Elsewhere, Sega gave its touch-screen virtual fish tank a UK airing

CUTTINGS



Lara explores 128bit

Following Eidos' announcement of *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* for Dreamcast (above), **Edge** has played a preview build and can confirm a nearly identical port of the PC version. Improvements are promised, with the control system proving a little awkward at first for anyone used to the PS joypad or PC keyboard. The game is set for an end-of-March release.

Rare leaks Conker secret

After many months in secrecy, *Twelve Tales: Conker 64* has finally re-emerged as *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. Swearing, violence and gore now permeate the cartoon-like environment. Conker plays an innocent bystander in all of the events, marking a major shift in Rare's (and Nintendo's) development policy. A unique gaming experience is promised.

Perfect Dark's camera woes

Rare has issued a statement regarding its much-anticipated option of scanning in players' faces into *Perfect Dark*'s multiplayer game, stating "In order to avoid any controversy, as of February 3 the fully operational Game Boy Camera feature has been removed from the game." A previous statement from NOA suggesting "technical issues" were behind the decision contradicted the feature being shown to **Edge** in perfect working order during a recent visit to Rare's HQ. **Edge** suspects that the current US climate surrounding videogames (which has seen Sega decide against releasing its Dreamcast lightgun peripheral) is responsible for the outcome.

PRESCREEN

EDGE PREMIERES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT'S FRESHEST FACES

The name of the game

The art of selling out to sell big

Consider these game titles for a moment: *Bear Bovver*, *Ah Diddums*, *Seaside Special*, *Chubby Gristle*, *Mr Wong's Loopy Laundry*. Now consider these: *Doom*, *FIFA 2000*, *Rally Championship*, *Quake*, *Formula One '99*.

Two sets of monikers from two different eras. The former era represented the halcyon days of computer gaming, when the unusual or distinctive were allowed. Risks were encouraged rather than flattened with a big corporate hammer. And, truth be told, many software publishers were simply flying by the seat of their pants. The latter era is, of course, where just about everything fits neatly into handy little boxes, and attempts are made to identify risks and eliminate them at source. Moreover, crucially, the money men – especially those with City investment concerns – can sleep soundly in their beds at night.

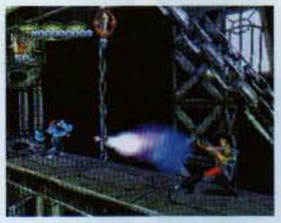
Fact: there has never been a better time to be into videogaming. But it can be difficult sometimes to look back upon its vast legacy and not feel the odd pang or two of sepia-tinged nostalgia when considering how much innocence has been lost.

Which is not to say that a little bit of yesteryear is not evident today, even at the most corporate levels of software publishing. Take Interplay's *MDK*, for instance. Here was a game that featured on an obscene amount of videogame magazine covers across the globe. Within the pages of these publications it garnered scores that elevated it to classic status in journos' eyes. Did its sales reflect its critical reception? Absolutely not. Sure, it was a success, but not a stratospheric one – which is what developer Shiny must have been expecting after all that glowing press.

Could it have been that Joe Average, a casual gamer not in the habit of reading magazines, could not get his head around the game's unusual hero, with his nondescript, all-black suit and oddly phallic helmet? Did Joe need a helping hand? Perhaps he needed *MDK* spelling out to him: Murder, Death, Kill. Yes, suddenly, in those brazen terms, Joe – who, with his like-minded friends, turn games into chart toppers or bargain bin fillers – has something more tangible to convince him to turn his £30 into hours' worth of gaming pleasure.

(And what of the game Shiny chose to follow *MDK* with – *Wild 9*? Even journos had difficulty getting their heads around that title.)

The more marketers test this kind of stuff, the more *This Is Football*s will be made. So goodbye, Mr Wong. It was nice knowing you.


What's in a name? Well, ask yourself what the average man in the street's interpretation of *MDK* (left) and *Wild 9* (centre) would be. Then consider the dumbed-downness of *This Is Football* (right)

Edge's most wanted

The latest games stoking **Edge**'s fire

			
Perfect Dark	**Tony Hawk's Skat'bng**	**Spider-Man**	**TWINE**
(N64) Rare	**(DC) Treyarch**	**(PS) Neversoft**	**(PS2/PC) EA**
Even without its Game Boy Camera face-scanning feature (see news), Rare's firstperson shooter should turn out as 2000's best Nintendo 64 title.	Finally, a machine capable of displaying environments that will do Tony Hawk's game justice. Sure, it's merely a straightforward port, but who cares?	SNES fans will remember the only half-decent Spider-Man game ever created; Neversoft seems intent on making a wholly convincing videogame.	The first game to use id's *Quake III* engine code has a monumental task ahead of it – improving on *GoldenEye*. **Edge** suggests that EA steals away.

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PRESCREEN ALPHAS

WITH THE JAPANESE RELEASE TANTALISINGLY CLOSE, PLAYSTATION2 DOMINATES THIS MONTH'S HOTTEST PICKS

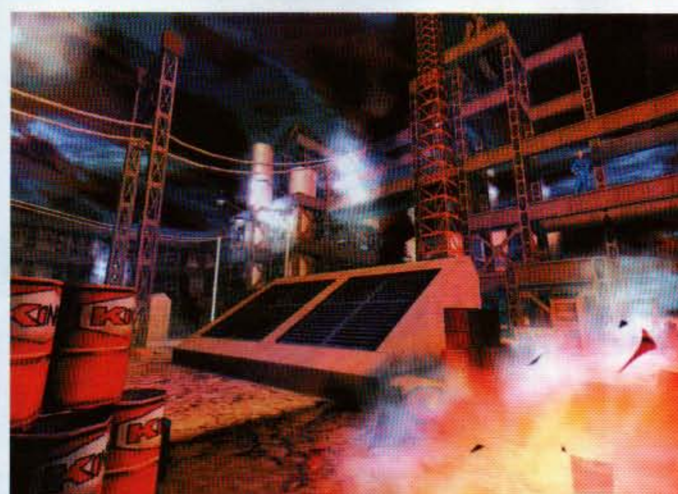
THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

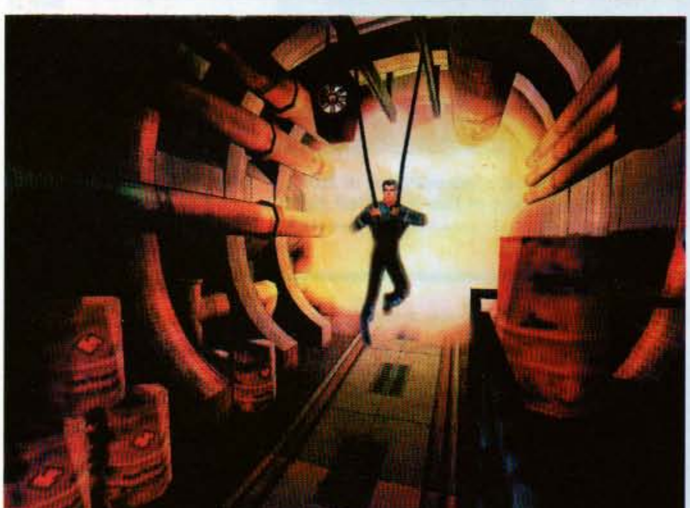
FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2/PC** DEVELOPER: **EA**













After the appalling *Tomorrow Never Dies* (a resounding Christmas number one, don't forget), Electronic Arts is embarking on another Bond-based venture, seeking to create the ultimate firstperson experience, for release in the autumn. Powered by the *Quake III* engine in its PC guise, the emphasis is on providing players with an incredibly realistic and fully interactive environment. It will encourage them to escape from tricky situations through improvisation and intelligent use of those detailed surroundings, retaining the spirit of Ian Fleming's spy. Id's AI and scripting routines have been scrapped in favour of a highly advanced proprietary system.

GEKIKOKAN PRO BASEBALL

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **SQUARE**



Subtitled *The End of the Century 1999*, this is the most impressive-looking baseball game to date (no surprise given its native platform). Boasting thousands of animation frames, the players throw, swing, run and dive in an astoundingly lifelike manner (though eagle-eyed observers will still spot the occasional glitch between sequences of animations). All the teams (with real player names, kit and sponsors) from Japan's Central and Pacific professional leagues are present, and matches occur in 11 superbly modelled stadiums, while players' facial expressions alter during play, and television-inspired cameras add to the illusion of broadcast-like quality action. The game is expected to hit Japanese stores by the end of March.

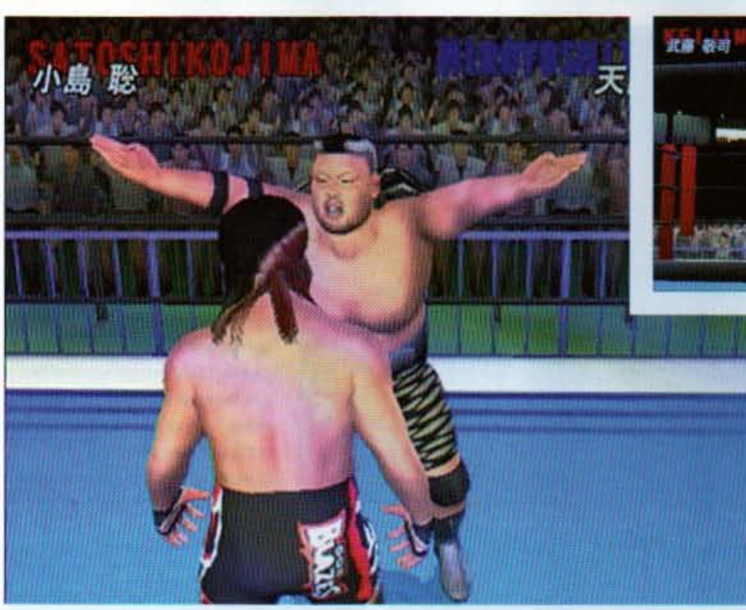






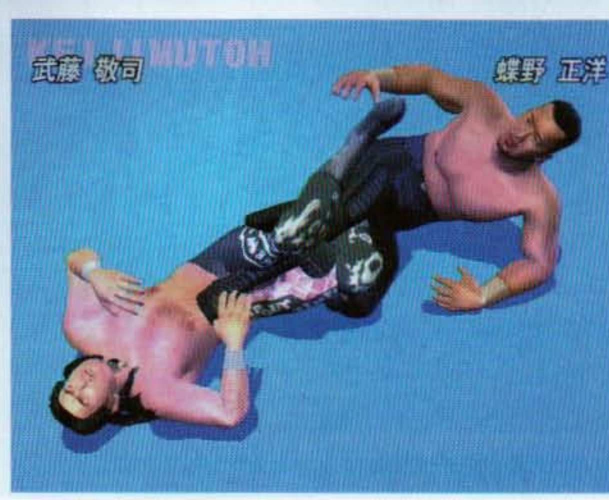
ALL STAR PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING RING

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **SQUARE**





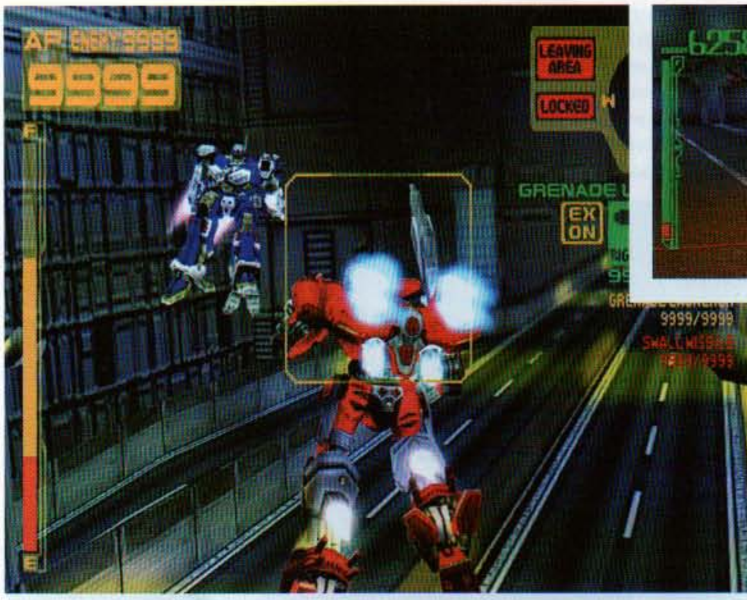




No new Japanese console is truly complete without a wrestling title among its early run of software, and, despite its promises of emotion and depth-heavy gaming, PS2 is unable to bend this rule. As with its stablemate highlighted above, Square's wrestling title represents something of a move away from the company's traditional output. And, like *Gekikokan Pro Baseball*, *All Star* features real personalities from the sport, whose expressions alter throughout the bouts. Expect the animation to be the most realistic yet seen in this type of game. With the amount of flab on offer, Sony's machine will be crunching those polys.

ARMORED CORE 2

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **FROM SOFTWARE**







Edge suspects some of these shots are the result of a little touching up – but the demo currently doing the rounds in Japan remains a technically impressive exercise, displaying the same night setting as the PlayStation1 version albeit with far superior graphics and constant fluidity in the form of a 60fps update. The PS2's power has allowed the developer to incorporate larger, more ambitious stages, while the plot is believed to revolve around Earth and Mars landscapes. Tuning your mech for battle is a good survival tactic, and a new gameplay option allows you to store bonus elements gained after bouts for later use.

MIDNIGHT CLUB & GETAWAY

FORMAT: **PLAYSTATION2** DEVELOPER: **ANGEL STUDIOS/ROCKSTAR GAMES**



Take Two Interactive has announced two PS2 projects due for this autumn (presumably coinciding with the machine's US launch). *Midnight Club: Street Racing* (main picture) centres on the world of illegal road racing – you drive around town in a high-powered vehicle until another club member challenges you to a race through the busy streets. Expect plenty of cars, extensive tuning options and a highly detailed gaming environment. *Getaway* (below) offers an open world where, as a smuggler sneaking contraband across borders, you must flee local police and rival smugglers. CPU-controlled comrades will be available to keep the heat off your back.

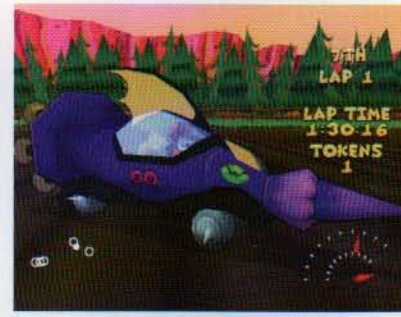


WACKY RACES

FORMAT: **DC/PC/PS** DEVELOPER: **INFOGRAMES UK**











Scheduled for a June release on all major formats (DC version shown), *Wacky Races* features all 11 characters from the legendary Hanna-Barbera cartoon. The game follows a rally-style progressional structure, with players battling for supremacy through a series of races. As in the cartoon series, challenges take place as one-day events and the terrain varies enormously from one meeting to the next. Setting up your racing machine correctly and packing the right gadgets is essential if you plan to become 'The World's Wackiest Racer'. You may remember a dismal 3DO *Wacky Races* title from a few years ago; rest assured this will be an altogether tidier title.

GRAND PRIX 3

FORMAT: **PC** DEVELOPER: **GEOFF CRAMMOND**

At long last, first shots of the 3D-accelerated version of what is likely to become the reference point within the highly competitive circles of F1 simulation, finally allowing previous realism champion *GP2* to retire gracefully from what has been a tremendous racing stint. News that the game will not make its planned March release (to coincide with the start of this year's F1 season) will shock only those not familiar with Crammond's previous projects. Unlike other digital F1 crown contenders, *GP3*'s 1998 stats are older than most – not that this will stop Crammond's loyal followers from choosing his product over chronologically truer alternatives.







TONY HAWK'S SKATEBOARDING

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **TREYARCH**

Dreamcast owners will be getting a chance to see what all the fuss is about in the spring, as Treyarch converts Neversoft's splendid skateboarding title to Sega's format. (The N64 and GBC will get versions, too, courtesy of different publisher and developer deals.)

With the promise of tripled polygon counts, hi-res textures and added colour smoothing out most of the angular characteristics of the PlayStation original, this is one game **Edge** is awaiting anxiously. Other than improved visuals, audio is the only other aspect which gets a revamp – Treyarch is blaming an unusually short development cycle for the lack of new gameplay features.









DEAD OR ALIVE 2

FORMAT: **DREAMCAST** DEVELOPER: **TECMO**



Are all videogame fans maladjusted dweebs who spend their more private moments poring over anything even vaguely feminine? It's clearly something Tecmo has considered, for rarely has a game worn cynically engineered fantasy female forms so brazenly on its sleeve as *Dead Or Alive 2*. Fortunately, the game just happens to be a competent brawler in its own right. So lonely DC owners should be smirking either way.







SILENT SCOPE 2

FORMAT: **COIN-OP** DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**









This twoplayer linkable follow-up to one of last year's most interesting coin-op concepts may technically improve on its predecessor, but **Edge** thinks some of the elements have perhaps been taken a little too far. It was shown in playable form at the recent ATEI show in London (see p10), and some of the realism of the original has been replaced with over-the-top antics which rob the experience of that beneficial, raw edge. With action based on one of the major tourist attractions found in England's capital, you're almost guaranteed the opportunity to accidentally take out an innocent bystander or two.

STARLANCER

FORMAT: **PC** DEVELOPER: **MICROSOFT**

It may be a *Wing Commander*-esque affair, but Microsoft appears particularly boisterous about how much punch is packed in this seemingly harmless package. **Edge** is intrigued as to what else may lie beneath the very impressive graphical surface. Scheduled for an April release in the States, it leaves little time before intergalactic combat erupts. Once more.





ANACHRONOX

FORMAT: **PC** DEVELOPER: **ION STORM**

Its *Quake II* engine and RPG values have made this seducing title one to keep an eye on for the past year. As with all good RPGs, the storyline is key territory. But as well as an already ambitious, multipathed plot, the developer has added a level editor, allowing users to create their own scenarios. Graphically, too, things have improved. A March release is expected.





POWER STONE 2

Capcom's arena-based beat 'em up is back, taking the innovative original into even wilder new territory with devastating moves



Capcom has opened out the arenas of the original, providing less enclosed scenes such as this submarine-based stage. Fighters can man the gun turrets and fire shells at their opponents in a refreshing new interactive element

Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **Spring**

Origin: **Japan**

The argument is still raging over which is the better DC title. The traditional yet beautiful *Soul Calibur*? Or Capcom's feisty, frenzied and – for a beat 'em up at least – inventive *Power Stone*? No one knows what Namco has up its sleeve at the moment, but it will have a battle of biblical proportions on its hands to top the promising *Power Stone 2*.

The game structure remains intact – *Power Stone 2* is still an arena-based fighter. Combatants have full 3D manoeuvrability and can pick up various objects to throw at enemies. The core play system has also been retained: you must collect coloured gems to power-up your fighter allowing him/her to unleash more devastating moves. From here on, however, everything has been expanded. Most obviously, four rather than two players can now take part in every-man-for-himself beat 'em up riots in beautifully realised, multi-level environments.

These areas are much more complex than those of the first title, taking in Egyptian burial chambers, weird sci-fi industrial complexes and even surfaced submarines. They all sport things such as ramps, holes, conveyor belts, chasms and platforms, to give the fighting a fully three-dimensional feel and taking the airborne antics of *Psychic Force* to their logical conclusions.

The arenas also evolve during a bout. In the Blue Sky stage, for example, the battle begins on



Some levels are occupied by massive creatures, resembling end-of-level baddies. Rendered with Capcom's usual flair, they add an intriguing twist







The camera is pulled further back than in the first *Power Stone*, to allow for the extra two characters. It adds a distinct element of cute





Each of the stages contains many levels to fight on, bringing more depth to the combat. Background detail is impressively diverse, too

a flying fortress which explodes, sending the fighters plummeting towards Earth – still fighting. The skirmish reaches its climax on a hidden military base. This is inspired level design.

And it doesn't end there. These arenas also contain new interactive objects such as gun emplacements which fighters can climb into and shoot from, and various vehicles (hovercraft, aeroplanes and tanks) which can be driven about and used as weapons. There are even a few creatures which add another element to combat – **Edge** found a huge arachnid monster which in any other game would appear as the ultimate end-of-level boss. The designers have clearly written the word subtlety on a piece of paper, torn it up and thrown it out the window.

Interestingly, the game is being developed simultaneously for Dreamcast and Naomi, and VM compatibility is added – players will be able to download data from the coin-op version to open new features in the console equivalent, which, if nothing else, seems like a great way to get gamers back into the arcade.

Four new, manga-style characters – Accel, Julia, Pete and Gourmand – have been added, perhaps in an effort to court a younger audience; comparisons have already been made to Nintendo's kiddy-friendly *Smash Bros* title.

But despite the immediacy of its control system and the gaudiness of its fighters, *Power Stone 2* retains a harder edge than anything you'd find Mario or Luigi endorsing. With its full-on destructive possibilities alone, it should appeal to gamers of any age.

Four players can now take part **in beat 'em up riots in beautifully realised, multi-level environments.** This is inspired level design





The Blue Sky stage (left) has players falling from an airship. But that doesn't stop them fighting. The Egyptian-styled stage (right) is more traditional *Power Stone* fare

DRIVING EMOTION TYPE-S

With *GT2000* having taken a predictable detour, SquareSoft is left with an open road towards domination of the PS2's driving simulation scene









Only two views are currently offered, but using the Driver's Eye option you can see the dash instrumentation alter according to what the car is doing on the track (right)

Of Square's seven announced PlayStation2 projects, it may surprise many to learn that this will be the first to make it on to the shelves. And yet it is a logical move – *GT2000* has been delayed until the autumn, and with only the arcade-styled *Ridge Racer V* to appease racing fans, it's the perfect time for a developer to release a more simulation-based driving experience without having to go head to head with Polyphony's world-beating franchise.

That's not to say *Driving Emotion Type-S* isn't likely to be a successful venture for Square. But as the company's first endeavour into digital racing (*Racing Lagoon* was essentially a driving RPG, and the fantasy-styled *Chocobo Racing* doesn't really count), **Edge** would be pleasantly surprised if *Type-S* leaves its garage at a standard nearing *GT* quality. Being a Japanese title, no prizes for guessing that models from Honda, Mazda, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Toyota and Subaru form a substantial part of the automotive broth being prepared by Square's coding chefs.

According to reports from Tokyo, foreign ingredients such as Alfa Romeo, BMW, TVR, Porsche and Ferrari are expected to be thrown into the mix – the latter being an unusual inclusion considering at least one other software company is known to have a large-scale involvement with the licence.

So far, as well as the main oneplayer game, three other modes exist. The revelation that the racing school option coaches you through the basics of race driving such as racing lines and braking points will be of little surprise. As with most other games featuring such an option, the techniques are taught to you via a series of lessons of increasing difficulty. The twoplayer mode, meanwhile,

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square**
Developer: **In-house**
Release: **Spring**
Origin: **Japan**





As in Sega's *F355*, the racing school displays braking areas as zig-zagging lines (left)



***Type-S* throws plenty of PS2's visual trickery into the mix, with effectively realistic results**



Eschewing the game's apparent quest for overall authenticity, races occur at various times of the day. Night challenges will prove testing





Car selection naturally features a strong Japanese presence (top). The twoplayer mode, meanwhile, promises to hold the screen update at 60fps

splits the screen, and in this format Square claims the update remains unaffected, maintaining a constant 60fps. Finally, a settings option allows you to set up your vehicle to maximise track conditions and personal driving characteristics. Anyone who is not interested in getting their hands covered in polygonal oil will find help to guide them.

There is no word on how many circuits will feature in the finished game, but you can expect a healthy number. As with the machinery, Japanese tracks are expected to make a strong appearance, while original racing venues ought to ensure a European presence is added to the proceedings. As in *GT2*, rallying is an option open to all *Type-S* entrants, though how significant an alternative it proves to be remains uncertain.

Although many aspects of the game appear to be in order, **Edge** can't help but be concerned about one aspect of *Type-S*: during a session at the recent Square Millennium event, it became clear that the developer has gone for authenticity and is attempting to simulate realistic car handling via a joypad, but as Polyphony found out when developing *Gran Turismo* (and anyone who has tried playing *GT2* with a control tyre-equipped car since), there's a delicate balance between realism and control. At the show, the Dual Shock 2 pad failed to be a fine enough tool with which to control Square's touchy polygonised vehicles.

It's hoped that this element will require simple tweaking. If Square fails in this regard, then so might the entire game.

Square wants authenticity and is **attempting to simulate realistic car handling via a joypad.** It's a delicate balance between realism and control





As expected, the cars are gorgeous representations of their real-life equivalents, with highly detailed bodywork and impressive sets of textures. As in *GT*, just six of these vehicles take to the track simultaneously, but good AI should ensure close racing. Like many early PS2 titles, *Type-S* will appear on CD-ROM

PERFECT DARK

Fear not, N64 devotees, for *Perfect Dark* looks set to deliver everything it has promised for the last 30 months. And a lot more besides











Weapons can be shot out of an enemy's hands which can encourage them to surrender. The Dolby Surround score is wonderfully atmospheric

An enemy displays his Predator-like cloaking device to no avail (main), while the Eyespy camera gathers vital info on the road ahead (top left), and night vision goggles prove necessary for part of a dataDyne-based level (top)







Head shots remain the most effective way of dealing with most opponents. This time, things are a little bloodier than in Rare's last firstperson title



A training level with its own series of challenges allows you to get to grips with the arsenal that you'll need later

The N64 may be on its last legs and steadily limping towards inevitable extinction, but you'd be unwise to turn your back on it just yet. Not while its 64bit technology remains capable of unleashing titles of this calibre into a market too obsessed with progress. Not only should *Perfect Dark* emerge as the year's best N64 title, it should also go on to be regarded as one of the finest examples of the firstperson shooter genre.

The action in the game occurs 23 years into the future and it's your role, as Joanna Dark (codenamed Perfect Dark), to uncover a conspiracy surrounding the powerful dataDyne corporation. Your nine missions, spanning 17 levels (excluding further bonus special assignments), take you to surprisingly varied locations.

Your range of arsenal is prolific and formidable: a collection of futuristic and contemporary semi-automatic weaponry (mainly pistols and machine guns) joins a selection of grenade (of the wall hugging and more traditional variety) and rocket launchers, sentry guns, knives, wrist crossbows, lasers and mines (proximity, timed, and remote).

There are also some other intriguing weapons – an N-bomb which assaults the neural activity of opponents, incapacitating them so that they can no longer hold their weapons; a psychosis weapon which transforms your average bad guy into a raving madman who is more than happy to spray a room with bullets (even if it means executing fellow comrades); a proximity pinball mine which bounces off surfaces until someone strays too close; and a drug gun (which makes progress and vision rather difficult in multiplayer).

Non-aggressive supplies include thermal and night vision goggles, data-thieving devices, and the Eyespy – a flying fisheye lens camera used to

Not only should *Perfect Dark* emerge **as the year's best N64 title, it should go on to be regarded as one of** the finest firstperson shooters

Format: **N64**

Publisher: **Nintendo**

Developer: **Rare**

Release: **April**

Origin: **UK**





When Edge played them, the multiplayer games (top) were suffering from framerate problems, which should be sorted before release



No, it's not *Turok 3*. Weapon selection is more immediate than *GoldenEye*'s. The Expansion Pak is recommended (not all options are available otherwise)





The trusty *GoldenEye* sniper rifle makes a return (with requisite futuristic design) and is just one of the numerous weapons available on missions

infiltrate and assess inaccessible or highly dangerous areas. Every weapon has a primary and secondary function. The latter can be anything from turning a machine gun into a proximity mine (useful in multiplayer), enjoying the benefits of a three-burst fire mode, using a particular weapon as a threat detector, or simultaneously targeting up to four enemies.

One of the pistol's secondary functions is non-lethal, for missions requiring you to render individuals unconscious, rather than exterminating them. You'll notice that if you get too close for armed combat, CPU enemies are now more than happy to practise their new kicking and punching skills on your frame, resulting in a momentary blurring of the screen should you get hit. Of course, you can return the favour; it's worth bearing in mind that a blow to the back of the head is more effective than one directed at a less vital area.

Also new is the way speech is used throughout (*GoldenEye* simply displayed text messages). Moreover, it's now possible to drop off edges. And enemy corpses stick around for longer, while bullet holes and blood stains are permanent decorations. Naturally, new death sequences feature, as do specific animations for wounded opponents (such as heavy limping following a leg shot). Expect to see a nasty blood trail – ideal for more mercenary players to follow.

As well as solo missions, the game offers a combat simulator mode with a one to four multiplayer option. It has 30 challenges, based on specifically created arenas and various options of play – CPU opponents/allies, team vs team, capture the flag, etc. Co-operative mode offers CPU or two human player action based around missions. Then there's counter co-operative, as Dark takes on a group of dataDyne agents. One of these is always controlled by another human player.

And it doesn't end there. In fact, Rare is packing so much into *Perfect Dark* that it's easy to see why the game has been in development so long. When it finally ships, however, the wait seems certain to have been worth it.

Though Rare had it working glitch-free during a recent Edge visit, the company has now scrapped *PD*'s face-mapping facility due to technical issues



Running on a 70-per-cent-reworked *GoldenEye* engine, *PD* also offers all of the control options found in Rare's astounding Bond title

GROUND CONTROL

Now among the most saturated of PC gaming genres, the RTS is about to be enlivened with a raft of tweaks as developer Massive thinks big



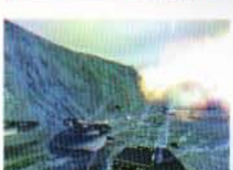


Explosions are of course central to any hi-tech battle, and the pyrotechnnics on display during *Ground Control*'s intense skirmishes should not disappoint



The game will allow you to zoom down to a soldier's viewpoint. How useful the player finds this in practical terms remains to be seen, though





***Tiberian Sun* lacked ambition. Will *Ground Control* give Westwood a wake-up call?**

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Sierra**

Developer: **Massive**

Release: **Summer**

Origin: **Sweden**

At the heart of the realtime strategy war game, two design necessities compete. The public demands ever greater visual realism. But the nature of gameplay brings out cries for clarity and easy control. The greatest RTS games have always favoured clear lines of sight over and above graphical sheen, opting for an almost board game-like presentation.

Games such as *Age of Empires II* have polished the pieces as never before, but still the genre cannot claim to be more than an abstract take on real life. *Ground Control*, however, aims to take the player far closer to the battle and yet still retains the ability to coordinate the action as a whole.

Based in the far future, two armies fight on a devastated earth, vying with one another to reverse alien technology and escape to a more hospitable planet.

In a nod towards *Command & Conquer*, gamers will be play alternate sides in the conflict, allowing a plot to develop and affect tactics and allegiances. But unlike *Command & Conquer* the game engine will be able to carry the player in among the ground troops, displaying detail right down to the smoke from individual infantrymen's guns.

Another vital deviation from the template set out by the RTS greats is that *Ground Control* will feature almost no in-play asset management. Instead of the frantic early game dash to build as many powerful units as possible, players are set more scripted missions with an arsenal chosen before the mission starts. Playing the game consists purely of continuous battle management, which takes place from macro to micro scale.

Ground Control's graphics engine has been in development by Massive for two years and has been designed specifically to cope with the game's demanding 3D requirement. Containing almost no hard coding, every graphic feature is scripted individually, allowing interaction to be based on real physics rather than artistic interpretations.

RTS fans happy that their genre has until now displayed a commendable lack of processor greed will be in need of an urgent upgrade when the game ships in the summer. Hopefully, they'll see it as money well invested.

CARMAGEDDON TDR2000

If controversial content was the element by which all titles were measured, SCi's driving games would be in a league of their own. But there's more to its latest than that



Vehicles are significantly more complex than those of the previous *Carma* games, with damage affecting a range of individually modelled car parts







SCi cites John Carpenter's movies and 'the more gothic takes on *Batman* and *2000AD*' as significant influences for *TDR2000*'s levels





Physics has always been an important element of the series, and *TDR2000* takes such considerations to new levels. Even when sharks enter the mix

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **SCi**

Developer: **Torus**

Release: **TBA**

Origin: **Australia**

Having generated over £10m in revenue for SCi, the *Carmageddon* series is nothing short of a gaming phenomenon. On the face of it, cynics would deem it the *Mortal Kombat* of driving experiences, selling on controversial content rather than integral gameplay values. But that would be to miss the point. *Carmageddon* was, after all, the title that predated *Driver* and *Midtown Madness* in offering players a drive-anywhere, anything-goes gaming environment.

"It's a great feeling to be able to do what you want in a game, and naturally the first thing people try to do in a driving game is run someone over," says *Carmageddon TDR2000*'s producer **Darren Barnett**.

"It's one of these fantasies that lets you do what you want," continues SCi's development director, **David Ratcliffe**, "not what everyone else tells you to do."

Following the departure of original *Carma* developer Stainless, SCi drafted in Oz codeshop Torus to take the series to its next level. The company brought with it a new 3D engine, and the visual benefits speak for themselves, with sprawling environments populated with the kind of detail rarely seen in driving titles.

"In the finished game there'll be over 36 challenges over nine huge environments," says Barnett. "But we'll also have multiplayer, deathmatch-style arenas including a multi-story carpark and an enormous suspension bridge."

These latter elements are destined to ignite the passions of Netheads who've followed the series like dogs with a bone since its inception. The games' open file structure has seen hardcore fans modifying existing cars and pedestrians, and, more impressively, building their own from the ground up.

"The Net fans have been absolutely crucial in coming up with the design for *TDR2000*," reveals Ratcliffe. "We invited wish lists from players and read messageboards to see what people wanted, and have incorporated the strongest elements." That's real player power.

With much more user-tweakability planned in from the outset, an even larger, more rabid fanbase is assured for this sequel.





The game's excellent dynamics stand out on the stunt level (above)

EVERGRACE

From Software jumps on the PlayStation2 bandwagon early, with a traditionally themed RPG, bolstered by lush visuals and quirky innovation







Sharuami (left) can use light weapons such as spears and a bow, and also boasts greater magical abilities than her stronger male ally, Yuterald (above)



The environment is truly organic (top). Realtime shadows exactly mimic the object that casts them and grow longer as the sun sets at day's end

Format: **PlayStation2**

Publisher: **From Software**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **Spring (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

It was several agonising months before the PlayStation received its first decent roleplaying game – a mistake, with hindsight, that Sony is clearly keen to atone for with the machine's successor, as this most obsessively followed genre is well represented in PS2's early line-up. Sony's *Dark Cloud* and *Evergrace* both hold huge promise. But the basic setup behind From Software's realtime 3D RPG won't win awards for originality.

The player selects from two characters, a boy named Yuterald, or a girl named Sharuami; throughout the game it's possible to swap between the two, while pursuing the same story. Naturally, both have their own strengths and weaknesses – Yuterald has greater physical strength, and can also carry heavier weapons and armour, while Sharuami can use light weapons and possesses other distinctive abilities. It's a standard RPG trade-off and the choice of tactics is yours.

Adventurers can, naturally, change their weapons in real time, but equipment may only be dropped or reshuffled at save points. And there are some truly unusual items to pick up – including a frying pan. In keeping with firmly established RPG heritage, most of these are essential in solving the game's puzzles.

Interestingly, *Evergrace* also links the power gauge to the energy gauge, so the strength of each weapon directly correlates to the health of the character – an interesting new feature.

Being a PS2 title, the most immediately striking aspect of the game is how it looks. Perhaps influenced by *Shenmue*, the game boasts a highly realistic environmental system which simulates the passing of day and changing weather conditions. Petals float on the wind. Sunlight filters through leaves.

And it would seem that the developer's tweaking process is far from over – there are plans to make the title intricately analogue compatible, so the stronger the weapon button is pressed, the stronger the attack will be.

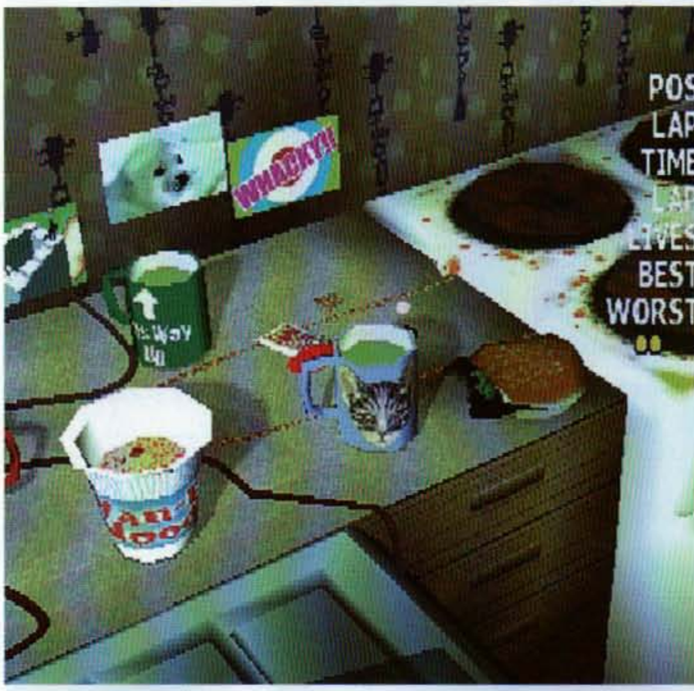
From Software's intention appears to be one of subverting the traditional RPG from the inside, introducing modest control system and gameplay innovations to liven up the genre. If other early developments for the platform prove equally as innovative, PS2 critics may be forced to eat their words.




From Software is considering changing the camera view to a more dynamic system – just one of many ways it will exploit the reserves of PS2

MICRO MANIACS

Miniature GM freaks stalk Codemasters' reinvented *Micro Machines*, with the franchise retaining the series firmly established pulling power



As with *Micro Machines*, *Micro Maniacs* takes place in familiar domestic settings. The Pot Noodle above is one of the most recognisable hazards in the game





***Micro Maniacs* offers a more flexible camera than any of its forebears, giving players a tracking shot of each course before you begin the race**



The cute family Tom is a ferocious killing machine when you're pocket-sized. As they say, most accidents happen in the home – and danger lurks around every corner

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Codemasters**

Developer: **In-house**

Release: **Spring**

Origin: **UK**

Although Rare tends to gets the lion's share of press as Britain's most gameplay-conscious developer, Codemasters has also spent its existence concentrating not on graphics or technology but on how much fun its titles are to play. And perhaps that's why *Micro Machines 3* – a 2D, top-down racer – hasn't been out of the PlayStation charts for around two years – and why *Micro Maniacs* is such an exciting proposition.

Taking the basic racing gameplay from the decade-old *Micro Machines* series, *Micro Maniacs* replaces the cars, boats and other vehicles of old with a selection of twisted characters. Manga meets 'Mars Attacks' puts you in the picture – freaky clothes, massive heads and weird special weapons (each character having his own) are the order of the day.

These are tiny genetically modified creatures, created by a mad scientist who believes miniature people will one day rule the world. But this is irrelevant – it simply explains why these minuscule, well-designed creatures are legging it around a series of circuits made out of familiar household and garden scenes *à la Micro Machines*.

Edge has played a number of the circuits in Vs and oneplayer challenge modes (the latter pitting you against four computer-controlled opponents) and *Micro Maniacs* looks set to provide the frantic, challenging gameplay that is the series' hallmark. You still have to dodge obstacles such as glue puddles, bottles, cereal boxes, gardening implements and the like, and the level design is still fiendishly tight. Everything looks sharper and the tracks are more multi-layered, with plenty of jumps, ramps and hills to give more of a 3D experience.

Admittedly, *Micro Maniacs* looks ridiculously basic next to *Gran Turismo 2* – but then *GT2* doesn't have crazy little men powersliding around toyshops, their pitter-pattering feet squeaking across slippy glass surfaces. For those seeking an alternative to realistic physics, complex vehicle tuning and endless option tweaking, this offbeat racer ought to be the perfect solution.



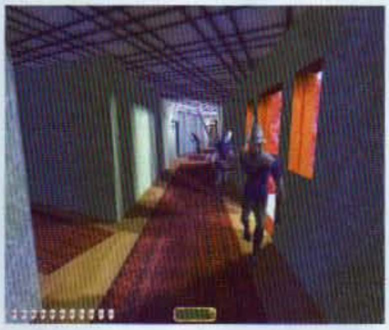
The tiny characters handle pretty much like cars, powersliding around corners and overshooting the rigidly marked out circuits if the player isn't careful

THIEF 2: THE METAL AGE

Sharper AI, more convincing environments and a fusion of steampunk and Tolkien enliven this sequel to the stealth-based medieval romp







Character modelling is much more advanced in the sequel – and so is enemy AI. Rushing in with a flailing sword will most likely end in death





Looking Glass has created a diverse city using the latest PC hardware potential

The first person shoot 'em up genre can be accused of many things, but subtlety is not usually one of them. Knee-jerk gameplay and splatter-happy weapons don't leave much space for tiptoeing about amid the shadows. Which is perhaps why Looking Glass' *Thief: The Dark Project* was a modest success. Based on stealth, silence and secrecy, the game separated itself from its noisy cohorts and provided some intriguing hit-and-run missions in a sensuous, Tolkien-esque city.

Thief 2 keeps the same setting as its predecessor, and the same warring factions (the keepers, the pagans and the hammerites). It also adds a powerful new break-off group, the mechanists, who have taken over the city, employing steampunk-style robots to dispense justice and quell unrest. The player once again takes on the role of super thief, Garrett, who must carry out a series of missions against the mechanists and loosen their grip on the populace.

There are many improvements over the original title, including even more advanced enemy AI (they have realistic hearing and sight, and will respond to any noise you make), 16bit textures and full support for 3D sound standards. This makes the environmental realism even sharper than before. Adding to Garrett's abilities is a new mechanical eye which can zoom in and provide heat and night vision, and a remote camera which can be thrown around corners and down cliffs to view the area before progressing. Invisibility and catfall potions are also included, to encourage the desired stealthy approach to each mission – something most players could easily avoid in the first title with deft fighting.

Apparently around one third of the dev team on *Thief 2* is female. Perhaps that explains the determination to avoid endless violence and create a game of suspense and intellect. So what do you do, if you can't just slay, maim and slaughter? Well, you eavesdrop on conversations, tail other characters, stake out key locations and participate in bank robberies. Sounds more diverse and involving than hacking at limbs and blowing soldiers apart with guns.

Whether or not gamers really can be convinced to creep around using shadows and fog for cover while avoiding the temptation to wade in with a sword and slaughter the highly intelligent enemies is unclear. With so much thought put into the level design and environmental and behavioural realism, it would certainly be a waste if they cannot.







The setting mixes steampunk with Tolkien in an attempt at an individual look

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Eidos**

Developer: **Looking Glass**

Release: **March**

Origin: **US**



















Photography: Martin Thompson

Speedball

The number of old titles gamers call to be exhumed is vast, but there's one title that sits atop the list whenever hardened veterans chew over the topic. Now, finally, the only future sport that ever really worked is being rebuilt, rewired and refined for the PlayStation generation...

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Empire**

Developer: **Bitmap Brothers**

Release: **May**

Origin: **UK**





■ The Brotherhood (from top):
Mike Montgomery MD
Chris White programmer
Dean Atkin artist
Byron Nilssen programmer
Pete Tattersall studio manager
Nick Dent artist

2100

After waiting a decade and then almost as long again on the train from London to Harrowgate, **Edge** finally sits down to PlayStation *Speedball 2100*. And although everyone is making light of the situation, in just a few seconds it will be clear whether the new, 3D and CD-ROM based *Speedball* plays just like the old *Speedball*. A joypad is taken in hand. The big, bright 3D graphics are summarily applauded. The game is underway. It doesn't play like the old *Speedball*. "When I slide in a diagonal direction or throw the ball that way, it's just not as quick as it used to be," groans your correspondent.

False alarm

The five-man team, The Bitmap Brothers' owner, the PR people and even **Edge**'s photographer debate the issue. **Edge** almost hysterically tries to demonstrate the perceived flaw as a crash bug. There's talk of the physics of the original being a bodge.

Then **Mike Montgomery** brings everyone to their senses: "I really want to make this point clear. You are the first person in the world outside of this office to play *Speedball 2100*. Today is the first time we've ever really had it running. Yesterday it wasn't playable. We've changed the ball code six or seven times over the last 23 hours already. We're not happy about it either. But it's one of those things that need tweaking," he continues. "A lot of things do. Even yesterday the players were running at half speed. We were going 'It's not right!' and Chris White the programmer was going, 'Well, the code's right!'"

It transpires that Montgomery – one of the original *Speedball* programmers and now head of The Bitmap Brothers – has been up from Docklands since last week, assisting with the code crunch. He's very tired and while he's as voluble as ever, he's a little emotional. But **Edge** has been here before. We've seen more unfinished games than finished ones and we're not open to emotional appeals. And yet Montgomery is right. We're already playing *Speedball 2100* again and again. And that's without any sound or power-up tokens, no proper gameplay fine-tuning, nor the nostalgia of dusting off an old 3.5-inch disc. Several months from release and *Speedball 2100* is already a decent, competent PlayStation game. So why are we making such a fuss?









A *Speedball* team numbers 12 players – including three subs who are vital. Smashed-up players are airlifted from the pitch by robot doctors



More balls than most

You have to understand that there's a passion about *Speedball*. The Bitmap Brothers and publisher Empire Interactive receive around half a dozen emails each day asking them to release a PC version, to keep the old team names, to lock the 3D camera steady or, simply, not to mess it up. And these pleas aren't from punters in the street. The pre-launch hype has yet to begin. These passionate missives often come from jaded and ruthlessly objective 20-something game journos. *Speedball* stands for everything that was best about their 16bit childhood. It was a game that could silence the endless Amiga-versus-ST debate with a reminder that while it was certainly a superb technical achievement, gameplay was all.



2100 is more customisable than its 16bit predecessors: team name, player names, colour schemes and 3D logos can all be changed

A few extra colours or a quarter of a MHz on the clock were irrelevant. This quicksilver gem came on like a banshee. Everyone who played it wanted to be a Bitmap Brother. If any UK coder strikes a moody black-and-white pose in **Edge,** he is probably inspired by the Bitmaps of old. All European gamers of a certain generation are curious. Everyone knows the rewards could be immense. Everyone wants it to succeed.

No own goals

If studio manager **Pete Tattersall** is feeling the pressure, he's not showing it. Tagging the original as a cult classic, he explains how the team began taking this quintessentially 2D game into the next dimension: "We looked at how the original actually played and what things we shouldn't change at all," he says. "We're not even going to give the player the option to change the camera view – they could be knackering the game up without realising it."

Homage to the past might seem a negative way to start – but *Speedball*'s elusive gameplay is something that simply can't be risked. Indeed, the team is kept on track by the old Amiga versions which are constantly running in the office. For the uninitiated, *Speedball* is a futuristic game of two halves. Or, as Montgomery puts it: "It is about going down to the pub, having a few beers and playing 90 seconds of pure hell against a mate." Despite all the chrome metal, the aim is straightforward. Two teams (boasting enigmatic monikers such as Brutal Deluxe) try to score more points than the other, by getting the ball in the opponent's goal or by racking up points with a score multiplier, even if that means trampling the opposition.

Besides the sheer speed, it's the pitch that makes the game. The ball can be bounced off the walls and you can even score goals on the rebound. Then there's the bounce dome in front of each goal that deflects the ball; *Pac-Man*-style warp passages; score multiplying; and collection of the set stars hanging on the walls. Oh, and just to make it even more frenetic, cash and power-up tokens sporadically turn up on the pitch. The former is used to buy new players or upgrade existing ones after the match. The power-ups are more immediately handy. Effects include being able to boost your team's strength or turning the opponents into geriatrics, the ball into hot molten metal, or the other



Each player has statistics for attacking ability, defensive ability, speed, throwing, stamina, intelligence, power and aggression. Between matches, cash can be used to bolster the attributes



player's controls upside down. Everything, from the pitch size to the power-ups, is included in the new version.

'We want to attract people who don't want to play *FIFA*. They don't need to know anything **about football. All the control, tackling, passing** and shooting is on one button'

Fed up with FIFA?

If *Speedball* sounds more like a shoot 'em up than the 54th version of a football game your uncle bought you for Christmas, it should. Like all Bitmap Brothers games, *Speedball* is about the thrill of the arcade, not a delightfully lofted free kick. Still, how will Generation PlayStation, hooked up to a constant dripfeed of ever more realistic sports games take to this brawling, hyper-realistic notch 'em up?

"We don't necessarily want to attract the people who want to play *FIFA*," says Montgomery bluntly. "We want to attract the people who don't want to play *FIFA*. To play our game, they don't need to know anything about football," Tattersall points out. "They don't even need to know anything about *Speedball*! They can just pick it up and have a go. All the control, tackling, passing and shooting is on one button. It's what most futuristic sports games have been based on. They weren't based on futuristic sports games, they were based on *Speedball*."

Graphically, the shift to 3D is a surprising success, considering the iconoclastic style of the original. The camera works fine. The players look suitably big and burly and react quickly – without any ludicrous, arduous motion capture to slow them down. Nice touches include reflections in the metal floor and the sparing use of prerendered vertex lighting. The solid look of *Speedball 2100* is maintained throughout the menus, which are all big, chunky and 3D. This isn't just for effect. The aim is to communicate the tough nature of the sport. "It's a hard man's game," says Tattersall. "The balls are metal, the walls are metal and the floor is metal. If somebody smacks you in the gob they're probably going to break your jaw. That's the type of game it is and that's the kind of effect we're trying to achieve."

He admits: "The most important issue in shifting to 3D is gameplay. Going from 2D to 3D, the dynamics change. What we have to do is keep the 2D dynamics but within a 3D scenario. But because there's no real depth in 2D, we can't emulate everything that happens. Issues are emerging now the game is up and running. One that came to light recently concerned the multiplier stars. In the original, it didn't matter if you hit them near the floor, in the middle or with the highest throw you could, the stars still lit up and it looked okay. In 3D, the ball can actually hit above the star. If we light up the star now, it just looks silly."

The first game was inconsistent – to continue this example, the notion of ball height did exist in places, and you could miss a score if you hit above the goal. And while the basic AI has been lifted from the Amiga CD32 version, lots of code has been rewritten for a 3D environment. Sorting out the code bodges from the brilliant balancing will take time. Hence Montgomery's caution that the game still requires much work.

Brutal Deluxe

Speedball 2100 might look an easy project – a makeover of a proven best-seller – but the twin pressures of appeasing unforgiving fans and the vagaries of the saturated and aimless PlayStation market mean that the Bitmaps have a job on their hands. And as the update of *Sentinel* a couple of years ago proved, being almost there is not good enough to justify a return to the past. Nintendo-style, the Bitmap Brothers must now get their latest iteration just (amazingly) right.

A couple of days before **Edge** goes to press, a call comes from Montgomery's PR: "Mike rang me on Saturday morning when I was shopping at the supermarket," she says. "He was manic. He said 'It's urgent, you've got to tell that guy that we've sorted out the problem with the angles.' Does that make any sense to you?" she asks. Yes, it makes a lot of sense. And do you know what? They might just pull it off.

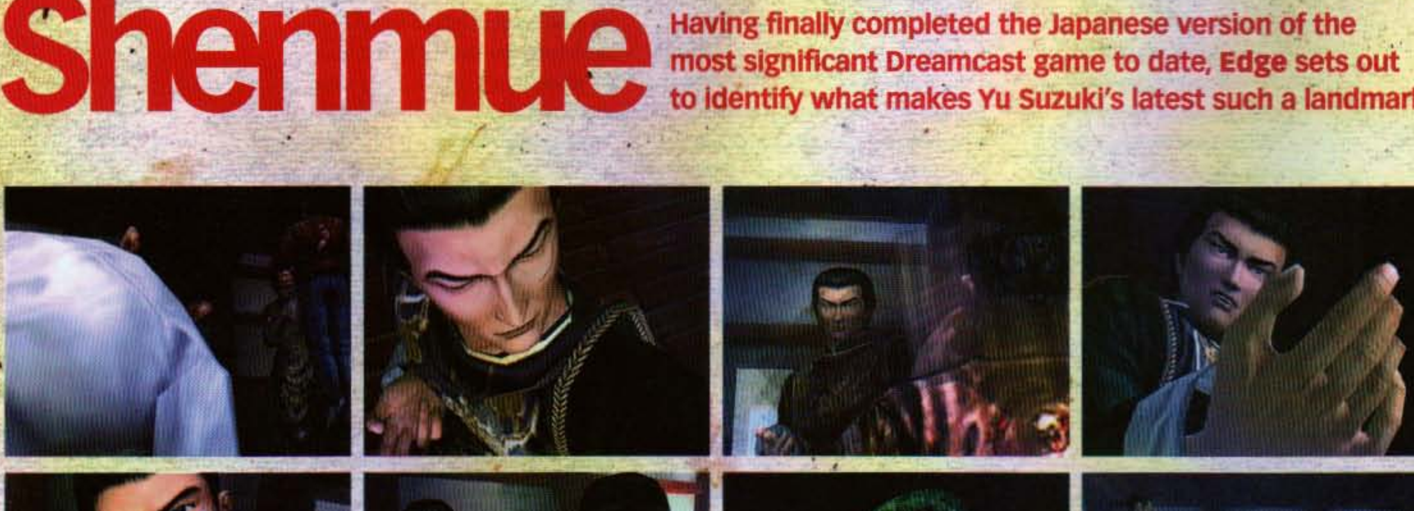


Knockouts, two-division leagues and three cup finals are included. One and twoplayer management and sixplayer leagues are options



Shenmue

Having finally completed the Japanese version of the most significant Dreamcast game to date, Edge sets out to identify what makes Yu Suzuki's latest such a landmark




















As a player, you have entered many types of game worlds. Until now, however, they have only managed convincing representations of architecture that exist in reality. You may have raced streets in high-performance cars and taken the lives of enemies while protecting your own in combat, but you have never been there. You haven't lived there. In *Shenmue*, the people, places and events that shape a person's life become the game. *Shenmue* is a meticulously choreographed illusion. And it is a kind which has never been seen before. Even more remarkably, it succeeds...












Sega's Yu Suzuki, in a typically thoughtful mood









Photography: Hiroki Izumi

It would be no exaggeration to call *Shenmue* a new type of videogame. Perhaps that explains why its producer, Yu Suzuki, has difficulty describing his project and ends up using a metaphor as a means of communicating his concept. Imagine *Shenmue's* world as an island. On this island, places such as an inviting beach, a valley and a waterfall await you.

The beach is an arcade, the valley a place where items can be collected, and the waterfall lets you connect to the Internet (*Shenmue's* Passport disc). The narrative is there to make sure you explore the island as directly and as effectively as possible – but remarkably, you're allowed to do whatever you want. You can, if you wish, spend a significant amount of time at the beach, for instance.

Up to one million Japanese Dreamcast owners can access the *Shenmue* network simultaneously to check out where they stand on the national ranking for mini-games

Originally planned as a three-chapter adventure, *Shenmue* evolved into a 16-chapter epic which was to be divided into three parts (incorporated into *Shenmue 1*, *2* and *3*). At one stage, *Shenmue 1* was set to have 16 chapters, but the game that recently shipped in Japan features but one. While the story may have been downsized, however, the density and volume have both increased.

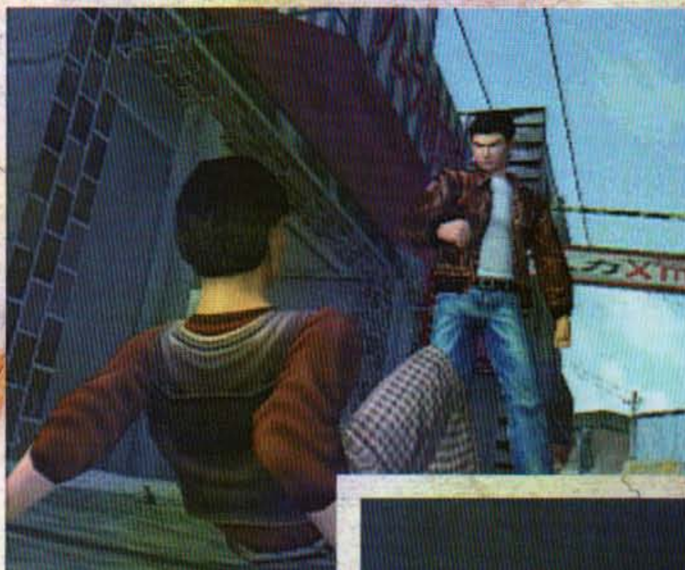
Ask Suzuki-san what he is most proud of in this three-and-a-half-year enterprise and he immediately talks about originality and the many new technologies used throughout the creative process. Fashioning code that allows players the freedom to wander aimlessly within a sprawling world is a task beyond many developers' imaginings – add a realtime weather system, 350 highly detailed character models (each with vocal dialogue), and complemented by 150 musical sequences, and you begin to understand Suzuki-san's claims that, in volume at least, the content is over 100 times that of a two-hour movie.

Moreover, the game features an Internet aspect allowing up to one million Japanese Dreamcast owners to access the network simultaneously to check out where they stand on the national ranking for *Shenmue's* mini-games. In addition, they may wish to trade items at an online flea market while getting handy hints and tips from fellow *Shenmue* players.

What Suzuki-san has planned for the follow-up remains undivulged. But he is confident of continual improvement to software libraries allowing for better games – so much so, in fact, that he claims that *Shenmue 2* should outperform the first game by 200 per cent.

But the next instalment is some way off (there is no firm date – it's another 'ready when it's ready' kind of game) – it's the premiere *Shenmue* chapter that **Edge** has been poring over for the last two months, and is finally in a position to comment upon authoritatively. Enjoy ten of *Shenmue's* dazzling achievements...

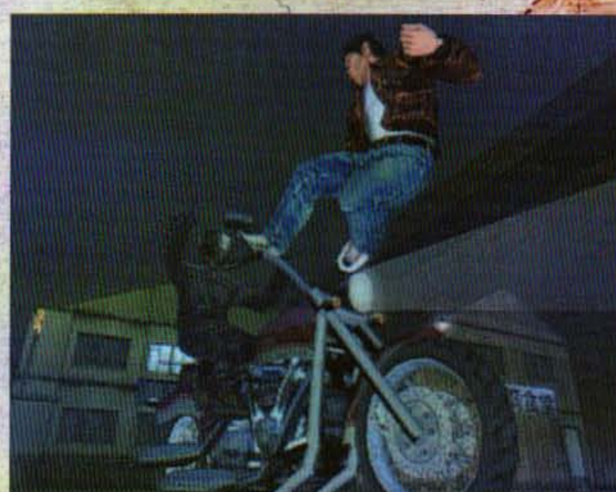
Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house (AM2)**
Release: **Out now (Japan)**
Origin: **Japan**











Quick Time Events are applied to all manner of incidents. And it's not only during high-action sequences (right) that they prove effective

01 Quick Time Events

Quick Time Events in *Shenmue* keep you alert to dangers, however slight they may be. This system has attracted criticism from those who haven't even played *Shenmue*, but it works perfectly.

Whenever it is necessary to react suddenly, icons representing a direction arrow or action button flash briefly on screen. A harmless example would be to catch an object before it falls – just tap 'A' to grab it.

QTEs become more complicated as the game progresses. During stand-offs with Mafioso types, the situation becomes tense. You don't know who is going to make the first move, or what you should do when it comes. Any number of icons will flash on-screen during the next crucial minute. React quickly and you humiliate the group. QTEs pull you into the scene. In reality, the effect is as similar to *Dragon's Lair* as *Pac-Man* is to *Unreal Tournament*.







Free battle fighting isn't especially complex, but it works beautifully. The accessibility of this combat mode means that taking out multiple foes becomes viable (right)

02 Free battles

Virtua Fighter maniacs will appreciate free battles in *Shenmue*. Ryo is similar to Suzuki-san's other famous character, *Virtua Fighter*'s Akira Yuki; his fighting techniques use a command system adapted from *Virtua Fighter* – in some ways it's more complex.

Moves are executed by combinations of one punch button and one kick button used with D-pad commands. It's not exactly like *VF*, though – pressing up or down causes Ryo to sidestep instead of crouching and jumping; a separate button is used to duck attacks.

There are moments where Ryo must tackle more than one adversary, and it's important to have throw techniques ready, to buy time, and commands that allow Ryo to strike out behind. There are also counter attacks that only work if the opponent moves first – your reflexes need to be extra sharp.

03 Practice makes...

It would be an oversight, of course, to assume every player is a natural at QTEs and free battles, and its opportunity for practice is one of *Shenmue*'s less-publicised charms. The QTE training is perhaps quite obvious, but nonetheless cleverly integrated. You find QTE machines in the Game Centre – one is a videogame, another is more of a physical challenge. A good half-hour session on these machines should serve to sharpen your reflexes.

What's especially impressive is Ryo's search for sparring grounds to brush up on free battle techniques. The most obvious place is the Dojo back home, where Ryo goes up against one of his father's students. Other locations useful for this type of practice come in the form of car parks and empty warehouses.

Ryo's entire repertoire is written on a scroll with commands listed alongside. New techniques can be obtained in writing, bought from a specialist shop and presented in curiously decorative envelopes. Friends who wish to help Ryo with his quest also step in on occasion to teach Ryo something flashy. Until Ryo copies his friend's routine he is not allowed to leave – which may prove frustrating for those short on dexterity.







Ryo gets to practice fighting in all manner of environments. A scroll maps out his repertoire (top right)

04 Work and play

When Ryo lands himself a job at the docks, he is told to arrive an hour early – to compete in the morning's forklift truck race. Ryo's buddy, Mark, gives the starter's orders every morning at 9am for five forklifts.

Not only is racing a blast, but it also helps Ryo become an expert forklift driver which enables him to get the job done more efficiently. The forklifts are impressive in their own right, featuring excellent controls and manoeuvrability.

Ryo spends six days working as a forklift driver, carefully stacking crates. By the time the contract is up, you actually start to develop a real pride for your work. It's true. Only in *Shenmue*.





How many other games ask you to get a job? Ryo's stint working at the docks is one of the most extreme examples of *Shenmue*'s eagerness to simulate real-life situations

05 Arcade action

Two classic Sega coin-ops are available to play in *Shenmue* – exact replicas of Yu Suzuki's *Hang On* and *Space Harrier*. They're ¥100 per go – and since Ryo is rarely struggling for change, it's tempting to indulge entire days.

Both games can be controlled using the DC's analogue stick, which will is a dream come true for Mega Drive *Hang On* worshippers – now you can lean into those corners just as you always wanted to. *Space Harrier*, meanwhile, features more enemies than the Mega Drive's pseudo-sequel. With somebody standing behind you to yank your chair around while you're hurtling full throttle and blasting away, you might just forget Ryo's sensitive mission altogether.






Attention to detail like you've never seen before: Ryo enters the Game Center and is faced with a number of entertainment options, including darts. But who could resist spot-on versions of *Space Harrier* and *Hang On*?







The quality of character portrayal means that you build a type of bond with NPCs that has rarely been seen

06 The emotion engine

Shenmue has entered new depth in the art of storytelling – which takes its time to hit home. The game is far more expansive than the greatest of RPGs, with the apparent potential to be more harder-hitting than epic movies, and occasionally more thought-provoking than a respectable paperback thriller.

There's something unique about enacting a drama in such a vivid CG world. You spend hours and days with characters. You can get so close that you even remember their eyes. These people gain importance on an entirely different level to that encountered in any other entertainment medium.

Consequently, you find yourself experiencing emotions that were previously impossible within a videogame. You develop a sense of gentle affection for the kid who cares so dearly for her stray kitten. There's a cold terror and a growing hatred for the man who killed Ryo's father – his friends alone make you feel uncomfortable. When it comes to a fight, you almost revel in it.

07 Taking it all in

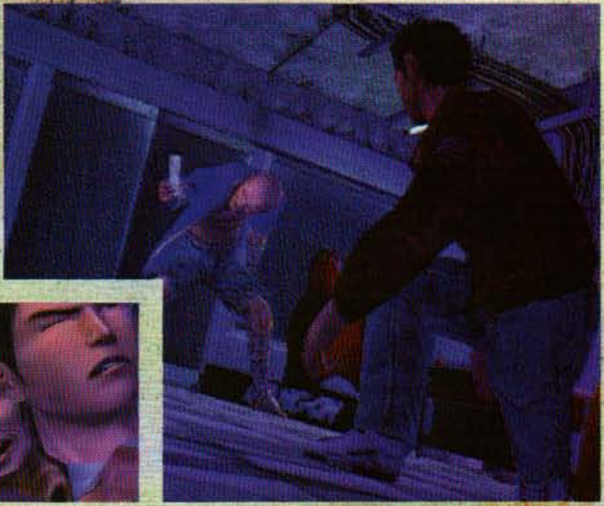
Outside the action scenes, Ryo functions as the player's eyes and ears. You can wander about in any direction you so choose, which is useful in finding a location, or when tracking down a specific person. It also gives you the opportunity to stand still and admire the magnificent detail in the game. There's even time to stop and pet a cat or read the label on a carton of milk before purchasing it.

Suzuki-san's team has applied so much painstaking detail that the illusion of reality can be startling. Somehow, though, the game would not feel complete without it.




***Shenmue* comes to life thanks to its astonishing locales. A 'real' game clock sees darkness descend (above right), and 'real' weather plays a part, too**




In its bid to offer a super-realistic experience, *Shenmue* can prove a humdrum experience – feeding the cat (above left) hardly raises the pulse. But this serves simply to heighten the tention when Chai appears (main)

08 The element of surprise

With its realism, the world of *Shenmue* surprises when elements of fantasy and horror are introduced. Days are commonly spent patrolling the streets, or working the docks. Conversations lead to more conversations. You get involved with a number of chores and fights. You catch the bus. You feed the cat. You pick up your daily allowance from the shelf on the way out to get some more batteries. If this were a movie you might say it's kind of slow to begin with, followed by sudden drama.

Chief among the unexpected is a character called Chai, a little bald-headed skinny guy who works for the Triads. After a few days asking questions and generally looking for clues, to suddenly have him spring on to the scene comes as a real jolt.

09 Making a shopping list

Though you can't interact with everything in *Shenmue*, there are still a surprising number of gadgets to hand. Some are essential; many are purely for amusement. It's imperative, for example, to make the occasional phone call. Ryo keeps a list of numbers in his memo pad – you can contact friends for hints or to make important appointments.

Likewise, it is necessary to visit the Tomato Marto to pick up certain essentials that will come in useful later. Other items are available at the store – such as music cassettes of questionable quality – but these join a long list of spurious junk. Guzzling hot Georgia coffee or adding to your collection of Sega-themed miniatures isn't going to improve Ryo's chances. **Edge** admits to spending a little too long pumping one vending machine for a small *NiGHTs* figurine (though it was snagged eventually).











The Saturn (above) is easy to find, which is more than can be said for its software. Phone use is essential (left); spending time collecting *Virtua Fighter* figurines less so (top)

10 Hiding the evidence

The easiest comparison to be drawn with *Shenmue* is with roleplaying games. No obvious goal is offered to begin with, other than to avenge the death of Ryo's father. Clues to the ultimate mystery are unravelled one by one, from information offered in piecemeal form by friends and family. Some characters just happen to be incidental – such as the town drunk who just wants to be left alone. Until you speak to people, you don't know what they're hiding, or even whom.

Though sometimes you encounter the same conversation many times over, it's equally true that some events occur quite naturally. Ryo may just happen to arrive back home and receive a phone call from Hanazaki-san, his apparent love interest. Another time Ryo might get involved in looking for a lost cat – because there doesn't appear to be much else left to do in town that afternoon as he heads back home.

It's hard to say how CRI could have improved on this illusion of combining circumstance with the obvious. Disguising clues among the routine all adds to the experience.





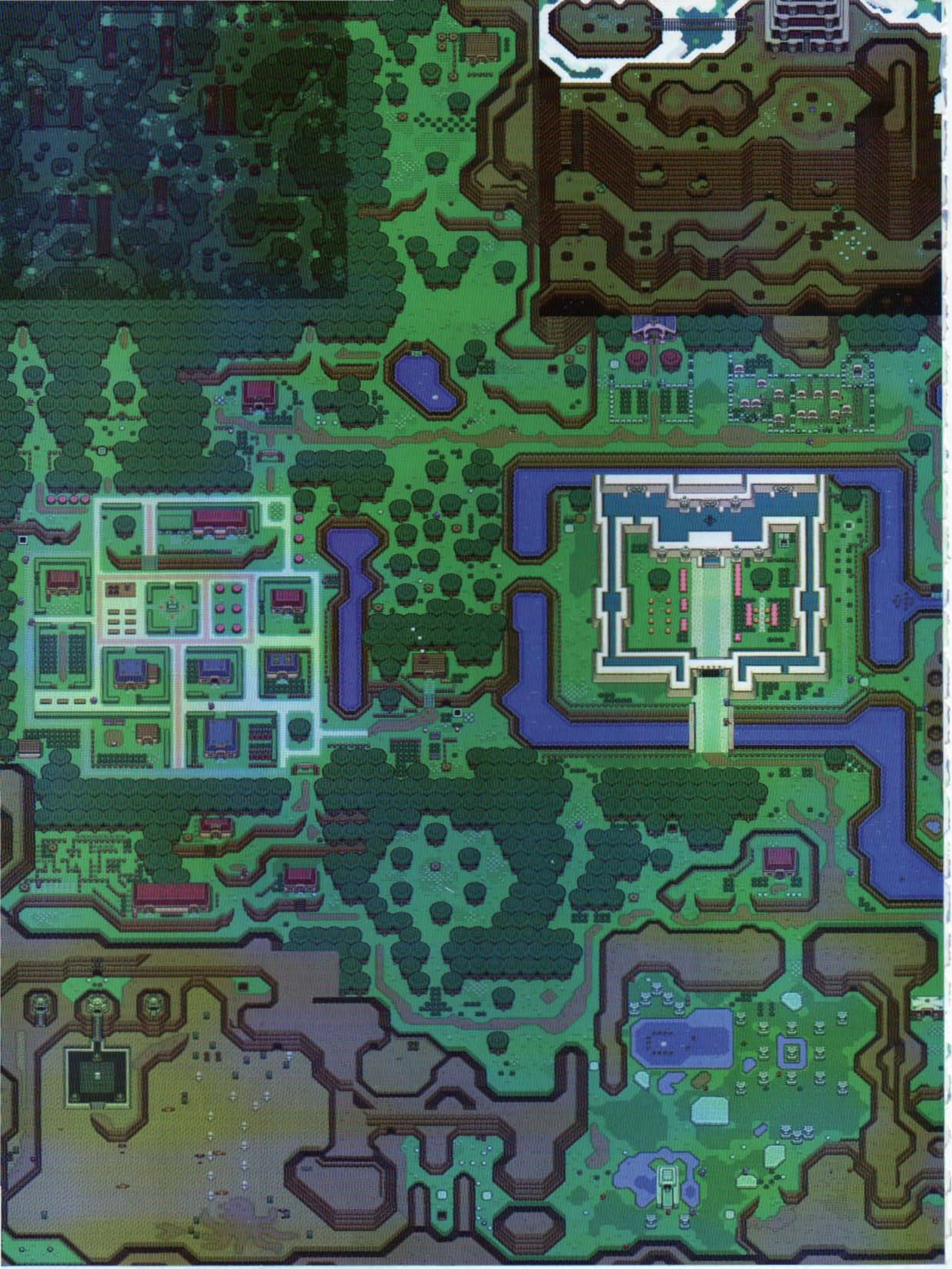


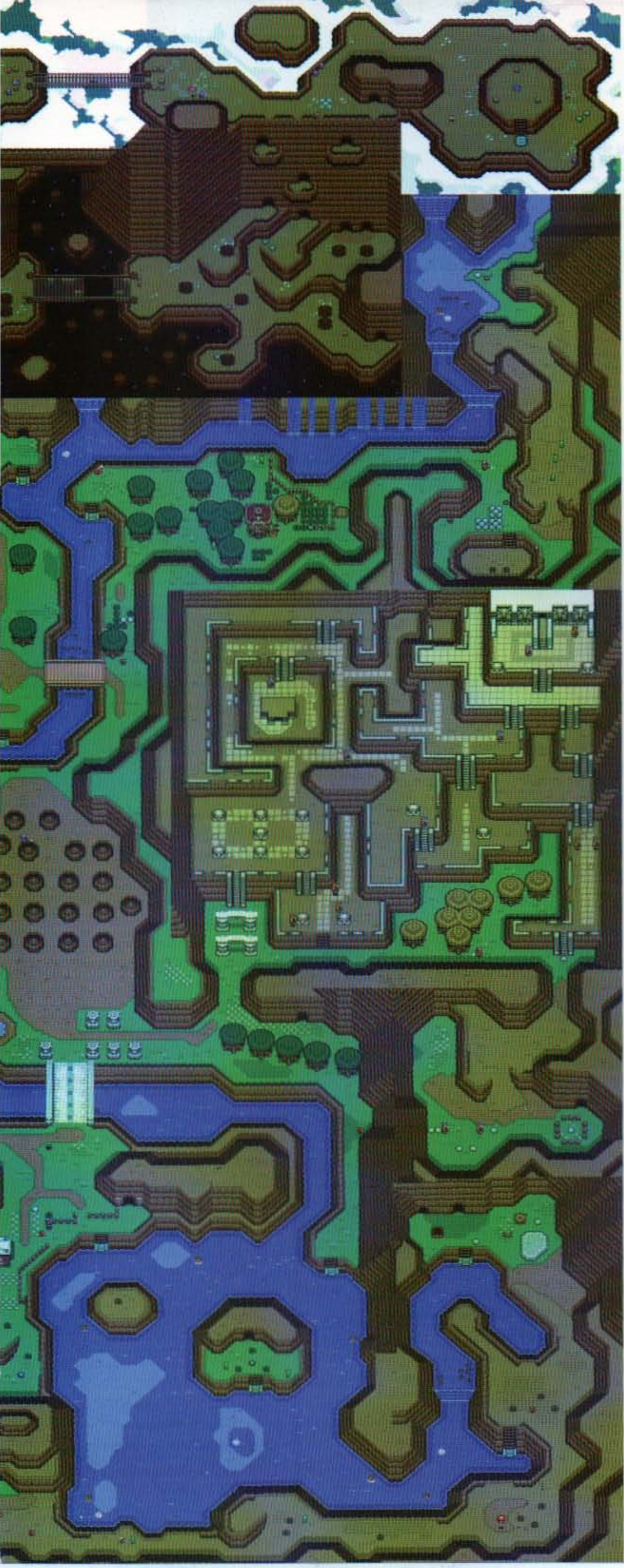






Characters come in many shapes and forms (350 in total), and range from the harmless (left) to the mysterious (above) to the downright unexpected (main)





size matters

Games are getting larger and larger, but who is actually bothering to play them? **Edge** investigates whether or not the 'size isn't important, it's what you do with it' argument holds true

Why do games, from RPGs to firstperson shoot 'em ups, so frequently expect their audience to dedicate in excess of 15 hours just to view their closing credits? How many people actually spend the time to read every last trivial utterance or explore that final dungeon? And why do codeshops have such an unshakeable desire to produce bloated, 50-hour epics when a condensed, action-packed 15-hour equivalent could be a refreshing and refined alternative?

Are developers being hoodwinked by the hardcore? Are codeshops preaching merely to the converted alone by producing epic adventures that demand over 30 hours of play to complete? Looking at mainstream videogame magazines or Internet chat forums, it's obvious that the most strident opinions are often those of devotees. *Metal Gear Solid*, it is said, is too short. *Final Fantasy VIII*, by contrast, is rarely criticised for its heavyweight 100 hours-plus of play time. Even *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, a title that demands about 30 hours to complete via the most linear route from start to finish, has been described as inadequate in length.

Do game makers know their audience? Consider the most fated consumer demographic of recent years: the casual gamer. By definition – as vague it may be – these are individuals for whom gaming is only an occasionally welcome diversion. Publishers are aware that while those who buy software on a regular basis pay the rent, it is the interest of the mainstream gamer that must be stimulated to maximise revenues. No true A-list title can live up to its billing unless it captures the imagination of the casual cross-section – as anyone working in the PlayStation market will confirm.

Videogames have much to learn from cinema (and, within the next decade, the reverse may also become true). But at the moment certain types of entertainment software doggedly, and almost naively, attempt to offer experiences modelled on their celluloid cousins. A hardcore gamer accustomed to filling gaps in the game with his or her imagination – or the patience of the dedicated practitioner – is more likely to forgive raw scripts or seemingly endless wandering. The casual gamer, lacking that experience or perseverence, is unlikely to be as generous. Can the art of telling involved stories via the medium of console or home PC ever hope to compete with the *Tekkens* and *Gran*





***MGS* uses tightly focused gameplay elements in order to maintain pace throughout the game. Around just about every corner lies something that will stir interest**

Turismos of the videogames industry? In Japan, of course, they already do. But in the west, that is very far from being the case.

Looking at the likes of Nintendo, LucasArts and SquareSoft, it can be argued that the standard of videogame adventures has never been higher. Even western developers have grasped – finally – the importance of measured character progression, among other, equally desirable, design attributes. But on the subject of size, perhaps game programmers have some rethinking to do.

Lacking the conformity of experience of a movie or a book, videogame adventures can be an often solitary pursuit, where isolated events are scattered in among environment-based tasks. Whether action-based occurrences or story updates, these events are often the hook that maintains or increases player interest. Could it be argued, though, that cutting out a proportion of non-essential busywork – like running from one end of the map to the other, or attempting to use a mysterious, newly acquired object in a variety of contexts in order to progress – would make games more enjoyable, more accessible? Could it be that the on-rails FMV genre is not the creative cancer that many perceive it to be, but a tentative first step towards a design brief that might be of greater interest to casual players than the likes of *Alundra* or *Shadowman*?

Is big better?

With a budget that few codeshops could ever aspire to, Digital Anvil's *Freelancer* is a behemoth in every sense of the word. And yet, as a PC title, its developer can make a few basic assumptions that its console-coding equivalents cannot. **Adam Medhurst**, art director at Digital Anvil, knows that PC gamers are traditionally well disposed towards large, complex titles. But does he fear that *Freelancer* is almost too big? Will many gamers, other than the seriously hardcore, get to see every bit of it?

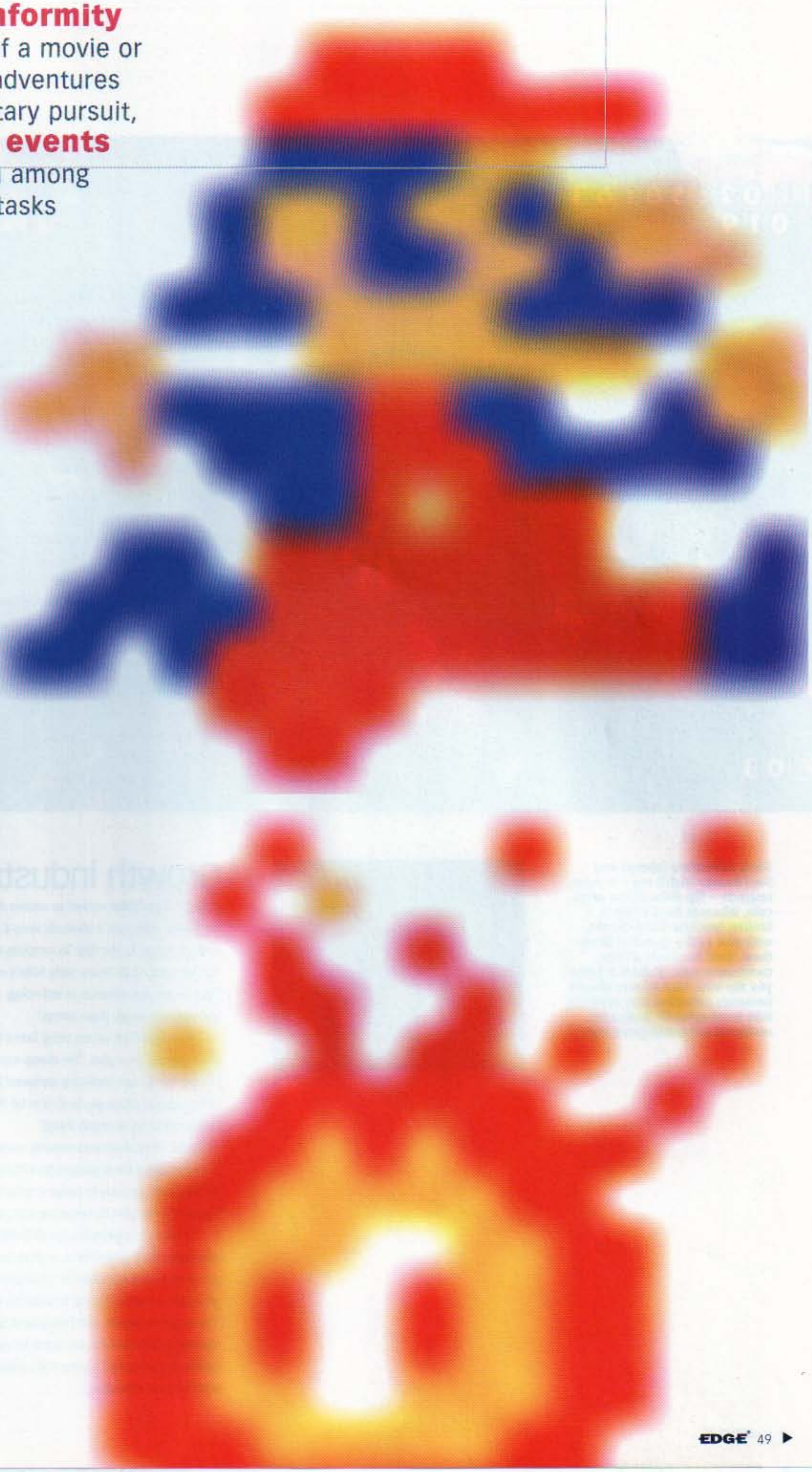
"We have to look at the context when using the word 'big'," responds Medhurst. "The physical environment is indeed big… an epic universe, which is expected by this section of the market. If the game, or at least the linear part, takes over 40 hours to experience, is that big? It really boils down to the playing style preferred by the individual. In *Freelancer*, the gamer builds up their status in the universe in a variety of ways, from quests to trading over many gaming sessions. All players will have the chance to see the majority of the world at some point. I am not sure if it really matters that not every single inch of the game is seen.

"I believe that interactive entertainment should not be disposable. Therefore one can play *Freelancer* several times and experience different stories, events and quests of many kinds. To allow this, the scale of the game needs to be generous. A large proportion of the interface is 3D object interactive only. This not only increases the sense of environment association within the world, but also addresses a common problem – large games offer little interactivity."

With a game like *Freelancer*, size *does* matter. But it's what you do with it that counts. "Knowing where to place emphasis, and how much, is the key," Medhurst states. "I believe scale is essential for *Freelancer*, to provide a truly absorbing and immersive environment – one that not only creates a true sense of space, but also provides a high level of interaction and depth. A game of this genre should feel massive to the player."

While the likes of *Conflict: Freespace* and *I-War* offer bite-sized set pieces, *Freelancer* ambitiously opts for an open universe, *à la Elite*. But the days when simple vector graphics were sustenance enough for hungry imaginations are long gone. Players now expect such games to boast visuals approaching those of CG sequences from similarly themed sci-fi movies or TV shows. Offering large-scale, varied visual content is an expensive business – as *Freelancer*'s current cost, at over $20m, attests.

Lacking the conformity of experience of a movie or a book, videogame adventures can be an often solitary pursuit, **where isolated events are scattered** in among environment-based tasks



Such resources are beyond the wildest aspirations of most codeshops, but Medhurst firmly believes there are other ways to achieve this goal without employing an inordinately large in-house art staff. The solution, he proposes, is to employ external talent. Until recent years this was practically a taboo within development – expensive and impractical. "I've used over 50 artists out of house, from over several art houses all over the world," reveals Medhurst. "From conceptual illustrators in Hollywood to 3D art houses as far as Russia and Vietnam. It allows me to build several parts of the game at the same time – and it also enables me to move faster and achieve continuity across the board from an aesthetic perspective. Companies can take economic risks by constructing huge in-house art teams.

"Obviously this methodology takes a great deal of organisation, planning and communication for it to be successful. But I can honestly say that not only has it really worked out well, it has been tremendous fun. The model lends itself well to the production of large projects like *Freelancer*. I see no reason why it shouldn't be as useful for any size of game."

Do developers physically, or financially, have the ability to undertake such massive projects? "It seems as though the constant decreasing cost of backing storage and RAM has resulted in more physical content," offers Medhurst. "With tumbling hardware costs we should also consider the increases in processor speeds in line with and above Moore's Law. Faster processors and cards have been turned over to handling the AI and rendering components in the game's loop. Why not use these added cycles to auto-generate content? Algorithms for auto-generative landscapes, interactions, textures, audio and characters – and so forth – all exist, yet developers still spend a large amount of time physically designing and prescribing these things to the gamer. Although there's a case for consistency, there's also a case for uniqueness and the unknown."







***Sonic Adventure* (above) and *Soul Reaver* (right) are – in many respects – flip sides of the same coin. Whereas Sega's title is broken into bite-sized chunks, with plot as the glue that binds them, *Soul Reaver* is a large, continuous epic. *Sonic* is a game you dip into; *Soul Reaver* almost demands extended play sessions. Why must episodic design be restricted to certain game styles?**



Growth industry

Acclaim's **Guy Millar** worked as creative director on *Shadowman*. A large and compelling adventure, it obviously owes a debt of gratitude to Miyamoto's magnificent *Zelda III: A Link To The Past*. To complete it, however, takes far longer – *A Link To The Past* lasts around 20 hours, while Millar's work takes at least twice as long to finish. Does he feel that advances in technology are forcing or at least compelling developers to create increasingly larger games?

"No, I don't think we are being forced to. Technology allows us to increase the size of our games," he argues. "I've always wanted to do a huge epic. When I played *Zelda* [on the SNES] I was absolutely captivated by it. It set the standard for the future. Better technology just allows you to do it in full 3D, or in high resolution – it helps us rather than forces us to do certain things."

Larger, more lavish environments come at a premium, though. "You do have to guarantee that a title is going to be a hit because of the cost," concedes Millar. "First and foremost you have to design it to be successful. In a marketplace such as we have at the moment it's becoming increasingly difficult."

But how can a game the size of *Shadowman* appeal to the wider reaches of the videogame marketplace? How, in short, can Millar hope to snare a casual player for a period exceeding 40 hours? "A casual gamer makes a selection in a shop. Once he's got it home, then he's going to spend his time playing the game, isn't he?" says Millar. "I've spoken to people who have played *Shadowman* for up to six or seven hours a night (and probably been the worse for wear the following morning). But people will do that. Once you find a game that's addictive, that you're really into, then you'll play it until the dawn is breaking."



How long – 50 hours, 15 hours, 15 minutes? With *Shadowman*, *Silent Hill* and *AVP*, the time required to reach an end or satisfactory conclusion differs wildly. Which game gets it right?







Spoken like a true hardcore gamer. So what did Millar make of **Edge**'s line in its *Shadowman* review, where it was suggested that many gamers with the requisite free time to complete it were kids prevented from doing so, due to its adult content rating? "I think as far as *Shadowman* was concerned with journalists… well, it takes at least two to three hours to get into it. That posed certain problems with the reviews…" Steady on. **Edge**'s man clocked around 35 hours with *Shadowman*.

"Those first few hours were, with hindsight, a bit dry," Millar continues. "We've changed that with *Shadowman 2*, as I don't believe initially there was enough of a 'phook' to involve the player. That was a problem with a few reviews."

So what about the accusations that *Shadowman* is too sprawling in places and, worse, positively unhelpful where directional pointers are concerned? "There's something in that," admits Millar. "It's a major problem in *Shadowman* that you can get lost and not know where to go next. As far as the design is concerned, if you keep searching you will find a way – some find that very satisfying. And there are always strategy guides or the Internet to help you."

So why does it not have a hint system, such as *Ocarina of Time*? "I think it can be a problem as far as suspension of disbelief is concerned. The *raison d'être* when making a game like *Shadowman* is to make it completely immersive. If you get text reminders popping up on screen, it might make you recognise that you're not actually there. Nintendo is good at this sort of thing in cartoon environments like those found in *Zelda* and *Mario* games, but in a game like *Shadowman* it's difficult to do because, fundamentally, although it is in a fantasy land, it is supposed to be realistic."

And that is a problem central to videogames. How do you maintain an atmosphere and a consistency of experience for periods of time that films, or even works of literature, barely touch upon? Surely that it is something that will only become clearer over time, as technology enables rather than restricts those commanding it.

Looking for some action

Whereas many developers might have approached a project like *Aliens Vs Predator* with their creative juices soured by cinematic aspirations, Rebellion's interpretation of the brief is a videogame first and foremost. The distinction is succinct. Broken into bite-sized chunks of high speed action, *Alien vs Predator* is a critical, commercial and cult success. Part of its appeal, **Edge** is often told, is that it maintains tension within its compact levels in a way that not even *Half-Life* can rival. Does Rebellion MD **Jason Kingsley** favour the episodic approach?

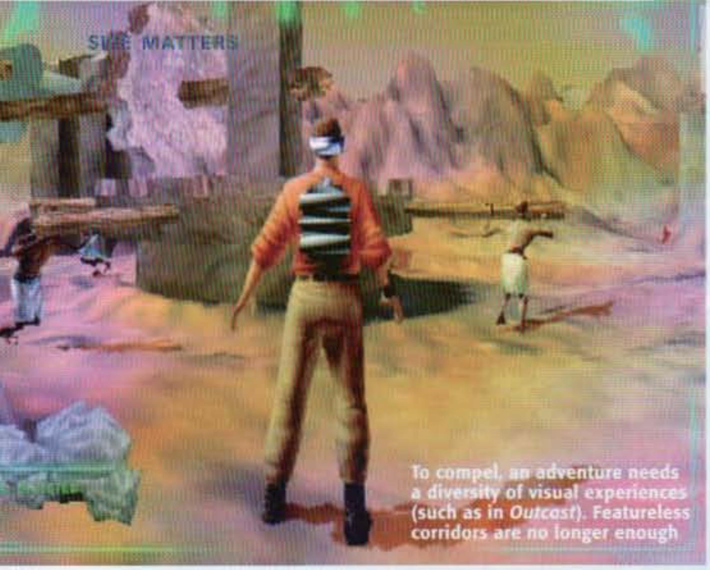
"It depends on the type of game you are trying to do," he claims. "If you're trying to do a fully immersive roleplaying game, you manifest your episodic inclinations in missions and things like that. But with *AVP*, it's so difficult, so frantic, we wanted to give players staging posts – a feeling of achievement. It was deliberately designed like that to give people a sense of progression throughout the areas."

Does he believe that the mainstream gamer has the time, or, for that matter, the inclination, to invest countless hours on an adventure? "I think your average gamer does not. But the hardcore gamer will spend all their spare time doing just that. We [at Rebellion] like the idea of games that give people value for money. If you get three solid weekends or 15 evenings of play – and I'm just plucking numbers out of the sky here – as opposed to 50 evenings of play, you're still getting pretty good value for money. More importantly, a more approachable size means that you're not wasting your efforts in building a game that most of your consumers aren't going to see.

"There's nothing more frustrating than building a game where half your players give up a third of the way through. It's important that people get a sense of achievement. And the learning curve needs to be right. People do go too far in building big games. But then, in many ways, I think some don't go far enough. They have the size, but you're not actually doing anything. There are some examples of games that I've tried to play but got sick and tired with. I'll be playing them and know what I've got to do but I've just got to walk too far to do it. Or you get the other phenomenon – that you can see that the testing is very thorough for the first third, less so for the next third and the last part is kind of chucked together. Games should be tested and refined thoroughly all the way through."

One problem that used to be rife in videogames, and which still rears its ugly head, is where ill-considered graphical touches and gameplay devices collide. Every gamer must have experienced this at some time or other, and the dissatisfying search for a solution it creates: the act of strafing against in-game furniture while tapping an action button, desperate for some kind of response. Kingsley is familiar with this flaw. "We always stress with new artists that if something looks like a door, it has to be a door. There's nothing more frustrating than showing somebody an entrance but isn't, unless it says clearly: 'I'm welded shut!' I draw parallels between this and some of the very old

"There's nothing more frustrating than building a game where half of your players give up a third of the way through. It's important **that people get a sense of achievement.** And the learning curve needs to be right"



To compel, an adventure needs a diversity of visual experiences (such as in *Outcast*). Featureless corridors are no longer enough

adventure games. You knew what you were trying to do – you just had to find the right phrase so the parser could understand. It's frustrating, because you've already solved the puzzle, but you can't tell the computer you've done so."

One criticism of larger games is that their designers often like to draw out a game with mindless busywork. Naturally, not every moment can be a scintillating set piece, but endless trawls through non-interactive locales can be dangerously tedious. "That's a dirty old trick, to multiply the size of a level or area," observes Kingsley. "It depends how it is done, though. In *Alien vs Predator*, there are deliberately areas where nothing happens. We use this to heighten the tension – it's a specific feature. Sometimes, you need those pauses simply to relax before the next big dramatic scene. Differences in pace are important in a game, but need to be there as a creative device. If they're there for the wrong reason then lulls are bad, cheap and easy."

Should developers consider using more external talent? Would writers with a keen appreciation of how to create a watertight film treatment be a boon in the process of scripting both gameplay and narrative for a videogame? Kingsley believes there is much for industry practitioners and their counterparts working in other mediums to learn about differing techniques or practices – and, in some instances, *un*-learn.

"I think there are overlaps, which are significant and will grow more so. But woe betide anyone who thinks that if they're a film-maker they can make a game, and vice versa, without going back to the beginning and learning again. I'm sure there are lots of scriptwriters who are talented and want to work on interactive scripts, which is great. But they need to learn so many simple things. You can't have a decision tree that splits into two and have 28 of them, because you'll have six million endings, which isn't practical. The plot strands have got to spread and come back, so you have nodule junctions in the story. You can't have it going off at random."

A question of time?

Metal Gear Solid is a classic videogame. As awkward and unrefined as its plot may be (the translation from Japanese to English is rarely kind), its high-paced action is condensed into a predominately gripping 10-to-15-hour lifespan. Does that fact relate, in any sense, to its commercial success? A connection surely exists. *MGS*'s distant relative, *Final Fantasy VIII*, could almost be described as more interactive storybook than game. It is almost the opposite of Hideo Kojima's masterpiece in this sense. The former entertains and immerses the player with variable play. The latter offers hour upon hour of dialogue as an integral part of the gameplay.

However, the two 32bit *Final Fantasy* games are almost an anomaly. With production values that are the envy of the industry, Square can call upon resources that few developers can ever aspire to. To complete *Final Fantasy VIII*, and doing so in a manner that takes in its side quests and secrets, requires 40 days at three hours per night, or 60 with two. That Square maintains such a high level of entertainment throughout is testament to its financial clout, and the legions of creative staff that this allows. When other codeshops attempt to work to a *Final Fantasy*-style brief, they invariably fail. Their games are too big, too sparse. They are almost desolate by comparison, with infrequent hook events punctuating hours of low-budget exploration.

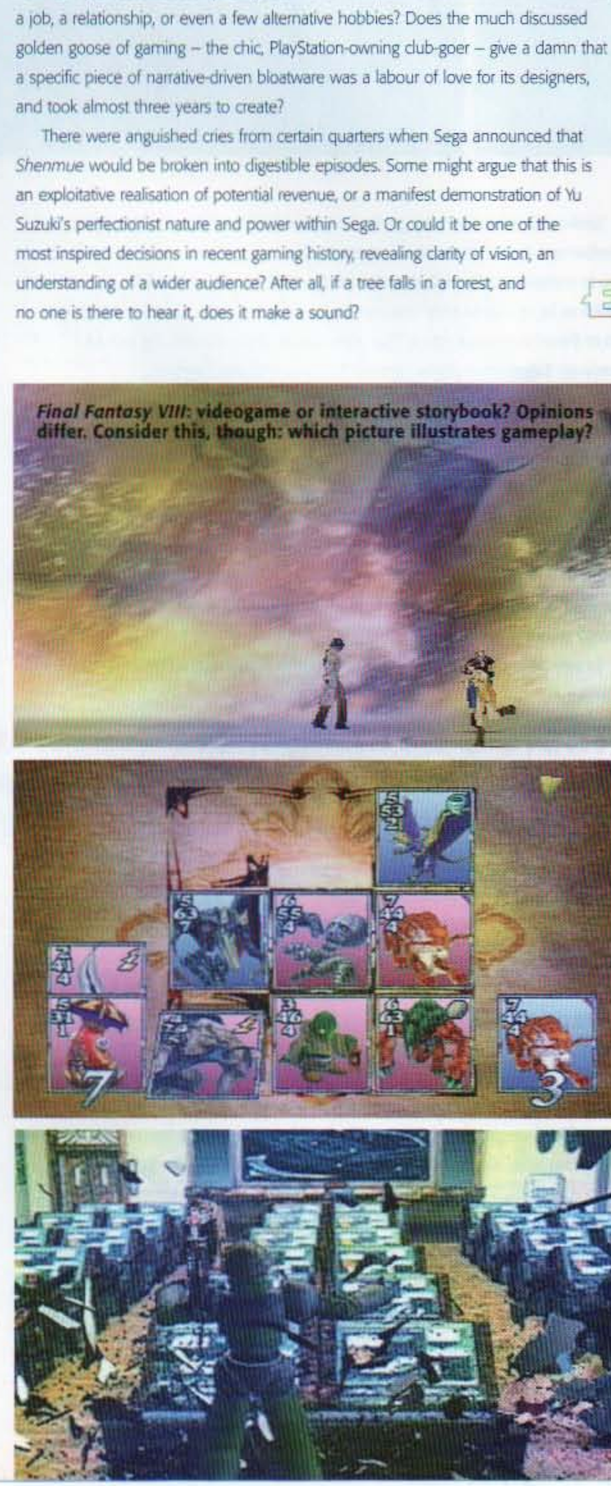
There is also the fact that some western developers fail to grasp the degree to which the industry is driven by Japan. There, with a far greater proportion of what we would describe as hardcore gamers, the heavyweight RPG is a staple of many software diets. In Europe and, to a lesser extent, America, that's patently not the case – it's unusual to see an adventure game top the retail charts.

Edge recalls an interesting topic of discussion after *Final Fantasy VII* enjoyed its brief sojourn at the top of UK sales charts: many store owners were surprised not by the rate by which units were leaving their shop but the rate at which they were being returned. Apparently many of these players simply couldn't relate to the sprawling plot, or lacked the time and patience to make any progress.

In conclusion, it's hard not to lapse into sub-sociological musings. Statistics could be cited to suggest that nowadays people have more demands upon their time than ever before; they simply lack the time to play games for three, even two hours a night. How can you reconcile completing *Ocarina of Time*, *Silver* or *Shadowman* with having a job, a relationship, or even a few alternative hobbies? Does the much discussed golden goose of gaming – the chic, PlayStation-owning club-goer – give a damn that a specific piece of narrative-driven bloatware was a labour of love for its designers, and took almost three years to create?

There were anguished cries from certain quarters when Sega announced that *Shenmue* would be broken into digestible episodes. Some might argue that this is an exploitative realisation of potential revenue, or a manifest demonstration of Yu Suzuki's perfectionist nature and power within Sega. Or could it be one of the most inspired decisions in recent gaming history, revealing clarity of vision, an understanding of a wider audience? After all, if a tree falls in a forest, and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?

Final Fantasy VIII: videogame or interactive storybook? Opinions differ. Consider this, though: which picture illustrates gameplay?





Hideo Kojima was the director of *Metal Gear Solid*, a game Edge believes strikes a fine balance between scale and compulsion to play. Who better, then, to offer opinion on this unusual issue?

Edge: Do you feel that games are in danger of becoming too large, that adventure titles requiring more than 20 hours' worth of play time are making unreasonable demands on gamers' time?

Hideo Kojima: For the typical person with a job, the play time of current games is definitely too long. There are games out there that seem to make you waste your precious time and don't serve as entertainment. Some RPGs have too many time-consuming enemy encounters that have no meaning in the overall story. However, one mustn't forget that these battle scenes can contribute to the unique fun of games. This means that if this interactive portion is fun enough, it will not be seen as a burden. It is not a matter of the overall play time, but a matter of whether or not this moment is fun. This is like trying to classify objectively whether the period you're going out with someone was long or short. If you like that person a lot, you want to be with them for a long time. Some couples only last for a few days, some couples last for a lifetime. For those who can only compare game entertainment to two-hour film entertainment, the long play time could be tough to endure.

Edge: Some hardcore gamers criticise *Metal Gear Solid*, believing it to be too short. What would be your reply to that?

HK: Obviously, the play time for *MGS* is shorter than that of RPGs with a lot of enemy encounters. I believe that the fun element and the density of the contents in *MGS* is not inferior to those games. There are a lot of games that are made of similar numbers of events and scenarios, but which force you to go through similar stages over and over – then try to give variation to the game by raising the difficulty level within the game. In *MGS* we tried to get rid of such time wasting and aimed for pure enjoyment of the contents at a pleasant tempo. I do now regret that the temperature morphing card key event in *Metal Gear Solid* was a bit repetitive, though.

Edge: Did you envisage *MGS* taking between eight and 12 hours to complete?

HK: The overall play time was only determined after we put together all the components of the game. What I think of first is how many events, traps, enemies, bosses, cinematics, etc, would satisfy the player. I then lay them out on a timeline. Only after this stage can the play time be determined. This intended playtime in the planning stage has nothing to do with the actual playtime of the finished game. For example, if the running speed of Solid Snake was slowed down by 50 per cent, the game would take twice as long. After we had combined a bunch of enjoyable components in the game and linked them, we ended up with between eight and 12 hours of gameplay. There's nothing to say that a game has to be limited to two hours, like films.

Edge: *Metal Gear Solid* has extras that players can only get to see by completing it. Do you think that developers should concentrate on making tighter, focused but shorter games and appease hardcore gamers by adding special features that alter the way the game plays for the second time?

The scenario in an action game is to limit the freedom of the player within the game. Without this scenario, there is no sense of atmosphere and involvement. The mission 'You are a spy. Avoid being found and save the world' is one that makes the player feel involved. The scenario in *MGS* is merely a tool to make the player dive into that world and enjoy a feeling of infiltration. In reality, one would probably like to play in a less limiting environment. That's why, for those who have finished the game, we include a mode in which the player can play more freely without being bound by the scenario. As you will see in the Game Boy *MGS* (or as you can already experience in *MGS Special Missions*), future games will probably feature a mode in which the player can play the same stages or in the same map but with a different mission objective. This may become the trend: the player learns the game system and action components in the main scenario mode, and then use what they have learned in the subsequent missions and bonus stages.

Edge: Do you think it's easy to distinguish the difference in value between something that is compact, yet packed with individual events, or large, but rather repetitive?

HK: Something with high density is preferable, of course. Total play time is not what's important. How many adventures and events and surprises a game continuously presents is key. Crossing a 1,000-metre bridge with 100 identical battles is not fun. Crossing a ten-metre bridge with ten different enemies is definitely more enjoyable. However, I do not want to reject the idea of a 1,000-metre bridge as a tool as long as it is well presented to the player.

Edge: Do you think it's possible to tell a story on a par with films if it must be stretched to fill up to 30 hours of play time?

HK: As long as the ups and downs throughout the story and plot are well designed, it is possible. All existing games are errand games – games where you must carry out actions to get a result. No story in any existing game, including *MGS*, is a real story in the true sense of the word. The final objective in a game may be to kill the dragon and the entire scenario simply makes the player collect items and information until they are able to do so. In adventure games, people are forced to look for the key to unlock the door. If the player has to keep on doing this for 30 hours there is no scenario or drama. In fact, there is a simple lack of drama. Even if the game is short and composed of a series of item collecting ('Get the orb to obtain the sword to kill the dragon...'), it is still an errand game. And during playable, interactive portions of the game, dramatic direction cannot be applied. This is why it is important that non-interactive, one-way demos must be shown to enhance the significance of a particular line or scene in the game.

Edge: Do you believe that games will become shorter as a side-effect of increased development time?

HK: If the game project prioritises reality, that would be the case. This is a critical but paradoxical issue for scenario-based games with the pursuit of realism.

Edge: How do you think game-size issues will be affected by the advent of new technologies?

HK: All of what I've been talking about here is one of the first debates to take place with the introduction of PlayStation2. In order to create realism-based games for PS2 with the same volume as similar games for current consoles, development time will multiply integrally. In 2D, creating a park involves simply drawing a picture and placing sprite characters. But in 3D, the entire park and background, along with the characters, must be created in three dimensions. Now we must deal with fountain water, sand in the sandbox, time and weather. Facial expressions must be enhanced, and there must be ten fingers on the hands. Everything in the park must be tangible and, ideally, interactive. This goes on forever. So what becomes more important than ever is what the designer sets as a top priority.



Edge Awards 2000

As gaming prepares to enter a new era, Edge salutes the achievers from the last 12 months of interactive entertainment development

Truth be told, the last 12 months have not been kind to the type of videogamer who buys **Edge** every month.

Just as the rise in popularity of computer gaming gave life to a crashing wave of cynical cash-in titles as the '80s drew to a close, 1999 saw the production of tired sequels and limp licensed titles ramp up dramatically. The resulting apathy among more discerning punters naturally reached almost tangible levels.

Which is not to say there is nothing of value to recognise as **Edge** looks back. If anything, in fact, the state of the industry as a whole has made the brightest stars shine even brighter. And if pure gameplay advances were difficult to pinpoint, at least it was not difficult to espy other boundaries being broken.

Poised on the brink of another revolution in videogaming thanks to the efforts of Sony's Japanese hardware engineers, it is time to recognise the winners of the last 12 months – before, hopefully, starting to build a mile-high stack of contenders for inclusion here in 2001.

Game of the Year

The most complete packages delivered during what might be termed a period of drought

Gran Turismo 2

winner



Developer	Polyphony Digital Inc
Format	PlayStation
Publisher	Sony

The most comprehensive racing title in the history of videogaming, *GT2* also happens to be a cunningly designed, technically supreme, exceptionally balanced, disturbingly engrossing, and infinitely enjoyable title. An astounding amalgamation of realism, structure and playability make Polyphony's game the year's best.



Soul Calibur

Developer	Namco
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Namco

runner-up

Simplistic on the surface, but, like the best beat 'em ups, convoluted once you learn its nuances, *Soul Calibur* cemented Namco's reputation as a master of any format it tinkers with.

Outcast

runner-up

Developer	Appeal
Format	PC
Publisher	Infogrames

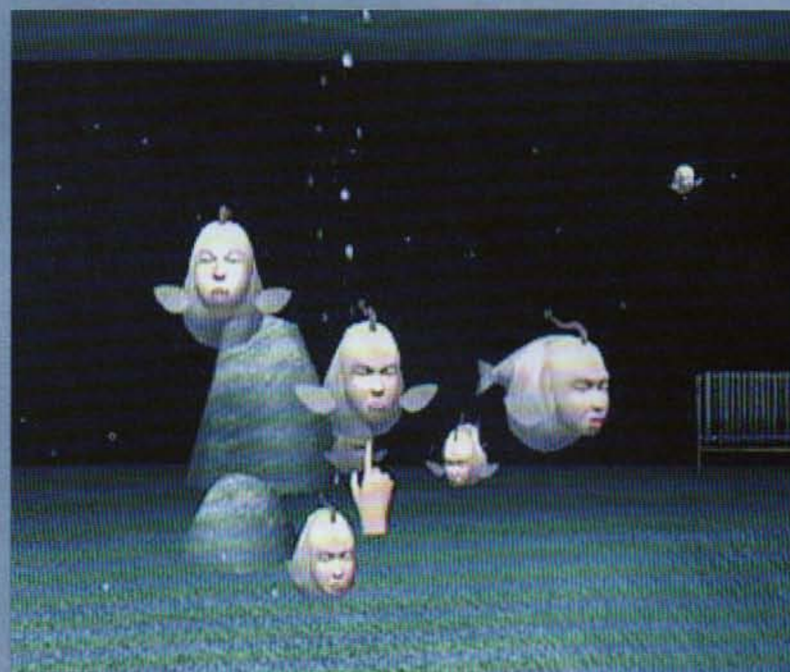
Technically innovative and overly ambitious, *Outcast* is a rough diamond. Despite its relative inaccessibility, however, the freeform universe offers a rare sense of startling immersion.



Gameplay Innovation

Thinking differently in order to break ground remains a tough task, making this award one of the most coveted

winner Seaman



Developer	Vivarium
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

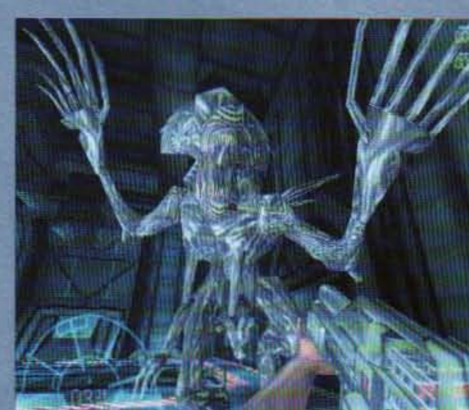
The cult of virtual pets taken to its extreme is the core of the *Seaman* experience – and it works. Hatch the man-faced fish from eggs and communicate with them on a daily basis using the bundled microphone; tickle them with a virtual hand; curse as they die due to lack of attention. Original and thoroughly engaging.

Aliens Vs Predator

runner-up

Developer	Rebellion
Format	PC
Publisher	Fox Interactive

Other games allow two warring tribes to be played, but no one has done it with the panache of this three-way FPS. Each class fights differently, and the multiplayer variations are huge.





Silent Hill

Developer	Konami
Format	PlayStation
Publisher	Konami

runner-up

Other games attempt to hide the PlayStation's visual inadequacies, but here Konami uses its draw-distance deficiency to chilling effect by draping atmospheric fog about the place.

Graphical Achievement

The most immediately gratifying part of the mix, and one that patently separates the men from the boys

Shenmue

winner



Developer	Sega
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Sega

It's been a long time coming, but Yu Suzuki's $40m experiment in creating what is a complete, populated virtual world in which a game occurs proves to be a mighty success. The level of detail on the character models, in particular, is breathtaking. Never has such a convincing representation of real life been built into a videogame.

Soul Calibur

runner-up



Developer	Namco
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Namco

If *Sonic Adventure* hinted at what Sega's 128bit console could do, *Soul Calibur* left the gaming world in no doubt. Extravagance abounds, from backdrops to characters to effects.

Homeworld

runner-up

Developer	Relic
Format	PC
Publisher	Sierra

Space-based games were dominated by blackness before Relic added bright technicolour ships, sparkling engine contrails and pastel gas clouds. Inky voids are now a thing of the past.



Technical Achievement

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of a videogame to mark out, but arguably the cleverest

winner

Hidden & Dangerous



Developer	Illusion Softworks
Format	PC
Publisher	Take 2

Purportedly developed in a mere 18 months, *Hidden & Dangerous* combines convincing visuals (lending it an unparalleled feeling of 'being there') and technical flair to maximum effect. Its squad-based AI, authentically researched missions, and excellent control system lend this 'game out of nowhere' a rare sense of coherence.

Soul Calibur

runner-up

Developer	Namco
Format	Dreamcast
Publisher	Namco

Remarkable because it came so early in the Dreamcast's lifespan, *Soul Calibur* made a mockery of claims that new systems cannot be made to sing during the early stages of their lives.





Soul Reaver

Developer	Crystal Dynamics
Format	PlayStation
Publisher	Eidos

One of Shigeru Miyamoto's most infamous beefs with CDs is load waiting. With its caching, *Soul Reaver* eliminates any such concerns, delivering its action seamlessly.

runner-up

Audio Achievement

The days of turning down the TV and slapping on a CD are long gone – now, soundtracks are to be celebrated

Medal of Honor

winner



Developer	Dreamworks
Format	PlayStation
Publisher	EA

Medal of Honor takes the interaction between movies and gaming to a new level, thanks to the involvement of Steven Spielberg and, at least as significantly, Michael Giacchino, who contributed a supremely well-paced score. The talents of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra create an impressive and tense atmosphere.



Wild Metal Country

Developer	DMA Design
Format	PC
Publisher	Gremlin

runner-up

Wild Metal's dynamic sample layering system helps create a realistic world where every object has an arsenal of effects associated with it – each one triggered by increasing proximity.

Final Fantasy VIII

runner-up

Developer	SquareSoft
Format	PlayStation/PC
Publisher	Sony/Eidos

Probably the most lavish sounding (and looking) RPG ever, Square's flagship brand continues to delight gamers with its mix of haunting character themes and recurring incidental music.



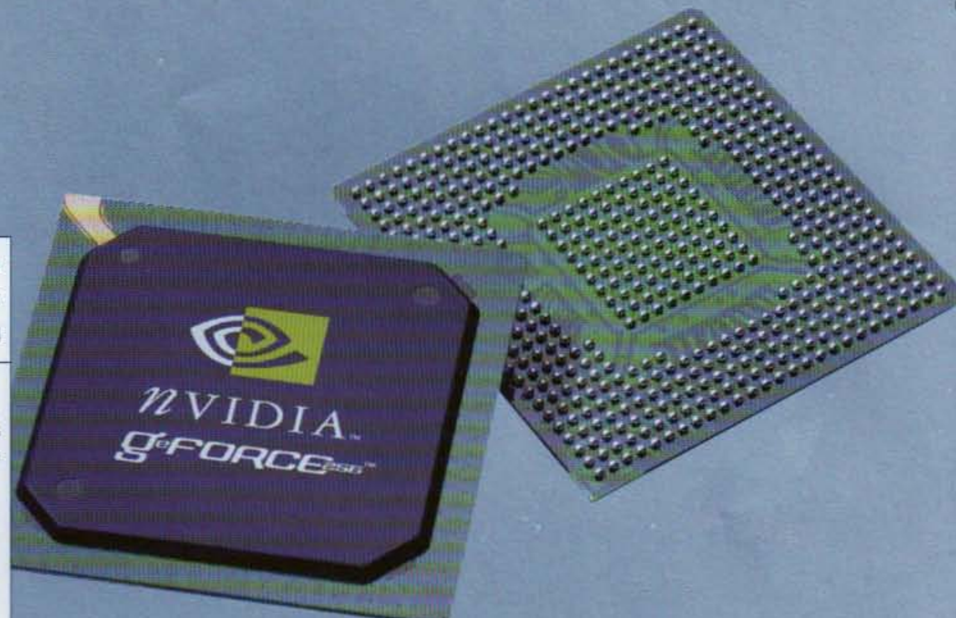
Hardware Innovation

Last year Dreamcast took the crown; this year sees an altogether gruntier piece of silicon stepping up for honours

winner Nvidia's GeForce 256 Chip

Manufacturer	Nvidia
Origin	US
Price	Boards from £200

Everyone knew it was going to happen, just not in 1999. Nvidia's GeForce 256 is the first graphics chip to take transform and lighting calculations from the CPU, freeing it up for better AI, physics and collision detection. Next year's games should play smarter and look clearer, thanks to the 23m transistors crammed on to this slab of silicon.



Neo-Geo Pocket Color

runner-up

Manufacturer	SNK
Origin	Japan
Price	£60

It doesn't have anything like the Game Boy's software library, but SNK's cute handheld kicks its competitor into touch where grunt is concerned. Try NGPC *Sonic* for ample proof.





IntelliMouse Explorer

Manufacturer	Microsoft
Origin	US
Price	£45

runner-up

It may not have been specifically designed as a gaming product, but the first mouse to ship with a laser tracker in place of a standard ball is beautifully designed and exceptionally effective.

Coin-op of the Year

The arcade industry may be in decline, and yet it continues to offer up the type of innovation simply not possible in the home

F355 Challenge

winner



Developer | Software R&D#2
Publisher | Sega

Edge admits initial apprehension at learning of Yu Suzuki's ambition to develop a simulation title based on Ferrari's Challenge race series. The thought of a fully fledged sim among the instantly gratifying titles usually found in arcades seemed a little odd. Yet how wonderful everything has turned out. Yes, it's a simulation. Yes, it's difficult. But the sense of involvement is utterly astounding.



Silent Scope

Developer | Konami
Publisher | Konami

runner-up

So many games now have sniper rifle options but Konami has taken the concept, pared it down to its core and added fast-paced and tense arcade action to the mix. The result is novel yet familiar and deeply addictive.

Brave Fire Fighters

runner-up

Developer | AM1
Publisher | Sega

Another in Sega's continuing professions simulations, *Brave Fire Fighters* is instantly entertaining. It also represents a breath of fresh air from the usual coin-op diet. As a frantic twoplayer cooperative experience, few things can beat it.



Developer of the Year

A category fought out by a number of Japanese codeshops, but only the most consistent could lift the trophy

Namco



- Soul Calibur
- Ridge Racer Type 4
- Tekken Tag Tournament
- Ace Combat 3

namco

Formats	Dreamcast/coin-op/ PlayStation
Headquarters	Japan

It crafted the one of the games of the year and one of the best looking games ever – in one package. Namco didn't only release *Soul Calibur* and kickstart Dreamcast sales in 1999. It also continues to impress with the latest version of *Ridge Racer* pushing the limits of PlayStation, as does *Ace Combat 3* – visually at least – while *Tekken Tag Tournament* adds polish to one of its most valued brands. And with PlayStation2's imminent arrival, all eyes must be focused on the potential of Namco's key early titles.

Publisher of the Year

In a year of corporate takeovers and mergers, one company put its money behind innovative games and ambitious developers

Eidos



- The Nomad Soul
- Power Stone
- Resident Evil 3
- Soul Reaver
- Championship Manager 3
- Braveheart
- Warzone 2100
- Tomb Raider: TLR
- Urban Chaos

EIDOS

Formats	Dreamcast/PC/ PlayStation/GBC
Headquarters	UK

It was once fashionable to deride Eidos as a one-trick pony, but its impressive line-up in 1999 was proof that those days are long gone. From the deals it has struck with ambitious startup developers to the canny licensing of top Japanese products, Eidos shows that business acumen and genuine love of computer games can coexist.

TESTSCREEN

The definitive monthly assessment of the world's latest videogames

Driving alternatives

How refreshing it is to encounter three driving games in the same month that offer more than merely the usual A-to-B formula.

It's not that circuit-based racing has suddenly lost its appeal – particularly when you're talking about racers of *GT* quality – but the prospect of getting to grips with yet another developer's absurd and feeble (and even absurdly feeble, on occasion) attempt at bettering *Gran Turismo* can have the nasty side-effect of sending neurones into permanent standby mode.

Attempting to create something to stand proudly alongside Polyphony's *GT* series is a futile exercise for just about every codeshop. So it's with no small amount of pleasure that **Edge** samples *Beetle Crazy Cup*, *Rollcage Stage II*, and *Crazy Taxi* within column inches of each other. If nothing else, it's proof that there are developers out there prepared to venture off-road with racing concepts. Granted, *Crazy Taxi* has been around for 12 months in coin-op form, but the opportunity to play it without the accompaniment of a pocketful of pound coins has grand appeal.

Of these three great titles, *Rollcage Stage II* emerges as the one offering the most complete videogaming package while validating developer ATD's claims that its effort was always going to be more than a simple, exploitative rehash of previous code.

Sony recently sent out a message to each of its PlayStation and PlayStation2 licensed developers warning of the dangers associated with churning out endless unoriginal sequels and copycat concepts. The company urged them to come up with novel ideas to break out of this destructive cycle and bring the emphasis back on attracting gamers through innovation. And it's about time. For the last three years **Edge** has been asking SCEI executives what the company was prepared to do about this predicament.

In some respects it's surprising that Sony has adopted such a proactive stance. After all, it's difficult to imagine the suits in Sony's vast music division sitting around a table bemoaning the lack of imagination evident among girl and boy bands. Rather, their debates are more likely to concern exactly what their company can do in order to grab a larger slice of this most cynically conceived sector of the popular music market.

Does this mean that the videogame industry is growing up more quickly than the music trade? Not necessarily. But the signs, driven by the likes of SCEI, bode surprisingly well.





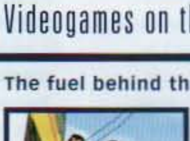
What do you mean, there's not necessarily a finish line? Edge's racing skills get rattled by the emergence of three titles offering unusual formulae, courtesy of SCEE, Infogrames and Sega

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. A game receiving a 'seven out of ten', for example, is a very competent title with noticeable flaws but which should still appeal to a considerable range of players. It does, after all, score two points above average and should therefore not be considered as such.

Edge's rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten.

Videogames on the Edge

The fuel behind those post-midnight working stints...



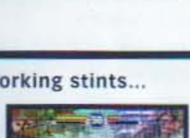
Shenmue (DC) Sega

Suddenly, the offer of learning Japanese at uni doesn't seem so absurd. Somewhere, a 'Japanese in 10 minutes or your money back' course must exist.



Gran Turismo 2 (PS) SCEE

The PAL release of the world's best driving game has forced one **Edge** *GT2* devotee to redo everything he had already completed in the Japanese version.



SFIII W Impact (DC) Capcom

Ken and Ryu may be the only characters given a regular workout by the **Edge** team, but this is one game even the art staff can get their heads around.



Colin McRae Rally 2.0 (PS) Codemasters

The arrival in the office of a three-stage demo served to consolidate **Edge**'s belief in the title's solid playability and technical improvements over *CMR1*.

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THE SIMS







A fire gets out of hand and claims a life (right). It's not as sad as it should be – you don't develop deep concern. (Above) Layout depends on the Sims living there



Certain possessions are obviously vital to a Sim's life, so it makes sense to buy them before blowing the family jewels on a 1000-sq-ft living room

The *Sim City 3000* saga taught the developer a valuable lesson: restraint. It saw Maxis abort several years work on a detailed, man-in-the-street city simulator for, effectively, a prettier *Sim City 2000*.

Maxis surely hasn't abandoned the dream of a fully realised metropolis, but now it's tackling the problem from both directions. A better, faster and more 3D *Sim City* is in the works. *The Sims* approaches the other end of the scale with citizens and their suburban castles. The result is brilliant.

By concentrating on simulating real people with their family feuds and television sets rather than the outlandish beasts of *Seaman*, *Creatures* and Tamagotchi, this artificial life game is effortlessly empathetic. But there's also a potential snag. Just as *Final Fantasy VIII*'s characters proved not quite realistic enough to justify abandoning the cute route, flaws in ostensibly real people are more easily spotted than in some genetically modified space gibbon. (It took a decade of innovation for the FPS genre to move from the fantasies of *Doom* to the realism of *Kingpin* and *Hidden & Dangerous*.)

But *The Sims* succeeds by keeping the simulation's scope reigned in. Sims don't talk. They burble with *Theme Park*-style pictorial bubbles. You don't see them at work. The game doesn't over reach itself in trying to create a computerised 'Brookside'. What you've got is an infinitely versatile house construction kit which in itself devours hours, plus a neat representation of the daily lives of whoever you put in there.

You focus on the environment, building Sims' houses and buying things with their wages. You can order them about, but if you're not on their wavelength they'll usually refuse, looking straight at you and shaking their heads with a plaintive 'uh-uh'.

That wavelength is down to a Sim's personality. With just a few statistics and a star sign, reasonable differentiation between the citizens is achieved. And while Sims have the attention span of Dustin Hoffman in 'Rainman', they've got the social skills of Tom Cruise. Watching their encounters is highly engrossing.

Great technology makes it all possible. Top-drawer game AI motivates *The Sims*. Brilliant animation and a masterclass in the use of sound smoothes over any loose edges. Recall the stupid routes your units take in even the most recent RTS games and you'll why realise Maxis' path-finding AI is a huge achievement. Here's a game where you can build a house of any

You can order Sims about, but if you're not on their wavelength **they'll usually refuse.** It's down to a Sim's personality. With **just a few statistics and a star sign,** differentiation is achieved



***The Sims* redefines the 'kitchen-sink drama'. The house can be viewed in various levels of undress, and also rotated to allow the ideal action view**



Format: **PC**

Publisher: **Electronic Arts**

Developer: **Maxis**

Price: **£35**

Release: **Out now**



shape, fill it with bric-a-brac and then call half a dozen sims around to party and they can still negotiate each other to get a beer from the fridge. The odd stand-off in a kitchen doorway is the exception, proving the rules work.

Actual interaction between Sims and their world is slightly less accomplished, although still the best yet. The AI's trick is to have nearby objects (televisions, computers, beds, etc) all bidding to attract a Sim's attention, with success largely depending on their current mood. The Sims live in a here-and-now world, demanding constant stimulation.

It will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with children or the Teletubbies that they tend to do the same things again and again – an expensive bookshelf or piano will not be seen as more appealing than the TV without your intervention. Still, compared to most A-life denizens, *The Sims* has renaissance men.

Theoretically – although it's not apparent for many hours – *The Sims* is actually somewhat limited. Maxis has played it too straight with the body types and personalities, while the toys run out sooner than you'd expect. *The Sims'* Web site will help, offering hundreds of downloadable objects and new Sims, plus the tools to create them, though that's not much comfort to PC users without access to the Internet.

But perhaps any gripes can be put down to the old 'Oliver Twist' syndrome – you can always ask for more. All things considered, it's better to see *The Sims* out a year after its E3 debut. It is undoubtedly one of the freshest experiences available on any platform. It's fun to play and it's instructive.

Other developers should get out their notepads, too, for Maxis has unearthed a host of design gems in this, its most essential release since the original *Sim City*.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



It's difficult to keep a lone Sim alive. They are social beasts, and you'll find that they tend to pine for company. Equally, they can end up broke





Ghosts frequent one of your initial homes (above). Burglars will pay a visit (top) when the Sims are out or asleep

NOX







The charming of beasts is a primary skill of the conjurer. Significantly, though, this key ability only allows you to dominate beasts whose scrolls have been located



While the end-of-dungeon encounters are dramatic, true set pieces are found somewhat lacking elsewhere in *Nox*'s convoluted murky caverns

These really are depressing times for the PC. In the last 12 months, its most established and respected developers have proved themselves unable to release games that go beyond the lacklustre and uninspired. The prime case in point must be the father of realtime strategy gaming – Westwood.

Was the critical success yet flat sales of *Blade Runner* enough to make it pick up its toys and turn towards the safe profits of recycling the past? Even the many fans of its *Command & Conquer* sequel, *Tiberian Sun*, must have been disappointed by its dearth of inspiration.

Enter the new, single-character action-RPG, *Nox*, which merely manages to reiterate the point. While it possesses the deep-shine polish that PC games have always tended to lack, a hunger for the future is equally absent, leading it to being an ultimately unsatisfying experience. The closest comparison is Blizzard's glorified *Gauntlet*-with-extra-roleplaying-accessories remix, *Diablo*.

Although the game deliberately steps away from the random dungeons of its inspiration, the stripped-down intensity of approach remains. Almost every element which has personified western roleplaying is included, from its straight Tolkien clone setting downwards. One of the striking elements of *Nox*, in fact, is its almost culture purist attitude.

Only the most peripheral influences of Japanese RPGs appears: villages totally populated by citizens who exist to say but a single sentence. The most prominent step away from the east is in the game's plot being notable by its almost total absence. While theoretically you're a man – sadly this is another of those single-sex hero RPGs – brought to a fantasy land by an evil necromancer, your origins bear literally no relevance to how the story unfolds.

The game seamlessly moves from your arrival to choosing which of the three character classes you wish to play. (**Edge** wouldn't take being torn from its plain of existence so happily.) But it's in these three character classes where *Nox* most impresses; in play, they're wildly different from each other. The traditional warrior and wizard may be expected, but their implementation shows a certain amount of flair – as well as the standard array of



The little story is told through cut scenes (top right). Often, archetypal good figures are slaughtered at the hands of the chief villain, while you remain unengaged because you have never encountered the deceased prior to that point

Format:	**PC**
Publisher:	**Electronic Arts**
Developer:	**Westwood**
Price:	**£35**
Release:	**Out now**



***Nox*'s technique of dynamically darkening areas which remain unseen to the player is a rarely used idea which enhances the game's atmosphere**

explosive magics, the wizard's more than capable of placing combinations of his spells into traps. And the addition of a functional shield to the warrior adds a surprising amount of delicacy to gameplay: by positioning the character correctly, incoming projectiles will be blocked.

Most praise must be heaped on the third class, the conjurer. While initially he seems merely a halfway house between the magical and martial poles, he quickly reveals his array of subtle nuances. The most impressive of these is his ability to possess – and, at higher levels, summon – certain beasts that you encounter, leading to increasingly manipulative play.

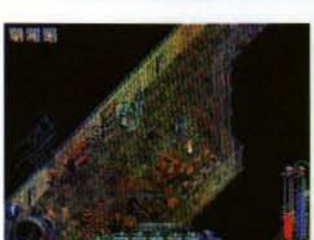
Each of the trio plays through the campaign starting in a different corner of the world. Visiting the areas of *Nox* in alternative order upon replaying creates a degree of emotional resonance, as you see what would have occurred in a place if you weren't there to defend it.

Technically, *Nox* doesn't come anywhere near the level required to impress the next-generation-hungry blasé crowd. It seems to continue Westwood's strategy of releasing games aimed at lower-spec PCs as a means of side-stepping the infinitely spiralling PC upgrade trap. The most notable effect is a rarely used atmosphere enhancer, which reveals only those areas of the map which are in direct line of sight, while the rest is plunged into chilling darkness.

The conjurer quickly reveals his array of subtle nuances. The **most impressive of these is his** ability to possess and at higher **levels summon beasts,** leading to increasingly manipulative play

While the solo play contains sufficient charm, the game's true success will be decided by whether the online community embraces it. Like *Diablo*, whose solo game was only mildly lauded, it's here that the real fight will take place. By offering the accepted game modes, such as capture the flag, out of the box, and with the three classes possessing powers such as trap laying, which are only really useful in the multiplayer game, it certainly has the potential for initiating controlled chaos reminiscent of ancient pseudo-classic *Spy Vs Spy* on a mass scale.

Nox's refinement may satisfy gamers who will happily pick it up because of the developer's name alone. Ultimately, though, it's a game you'll play to completion but would never find yourself eulogising to friends. *Nox*'s approach may sell well today, but with its rampant cultural retroisms, Westwood may well find that it has sacrificed its tomorrow. The future of videogaming has rarely seemed further away.



The fire imps are typical of *Nox*'s foes, with effective powers and exploitable weaknesses

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

CRAZY TAXI

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house**
Price: **£40**
Release: **Out now**











Despite the two play areas' many locations, and 16 mini-games (above), the action in *Crazy Taxi* rapidly becomes repetitive

Despite playing *Crazy Taxi* obsessively for a couple of days when the preview code arrived at **Edge**'s office, weeks passed with no one bothering to load up Sega's cabbie simulator again.

Now the review version has arrived at **Edge**'s HQ, once again many hours have been spent ferrying demanding customers around masterfully rendered city environments – the second, Dreamcast-only level now running as swiftly and smoothly as its arcade-originating counterpart.





Fail to deliver your customers to their destination within the strict time limit and they won't wait for you to stop before abandoning ship (right)

Both are tremendous in scope and offer an abundance of locale variation, shortcuts, and secret passageways as well as hordes of potential customers lining their many thoroughfares. These are colour coded (green for longer journeys through to red for shortest) allowing you to inject a little strategy into planning your journeys.

Mastering power sliding (Crazy Drift) and turbo-boosting (Crazy Dash) your way around town should ensure that your customers will reach their destinations in record time. This not only ensures higher fares (the longer you take, the less you earn) but more seconds remain to pick up another taxi-seeking pedestrian. As well as playing along to arcade rules (rapid passenger delivery boosts the time limit and hence keeps you in play) you have the option of selecting fixed time modes (three, five or ten minutes). It's an easy way to balance game time if a group of you is playing.

There are no prizes for guessing that the finished game is a lot of fun. After all, *Crazy Taxi*'s premise makes perfect videogame fodder.

Despite the game's initial impact, however, it's not quite the triumph some have already termed it. At times, for example, gameplay can spill over into the realms of the preposterously frantic, robbing you of solid play. A more serious issue is the reality that, even with the extra city and 16 mini-games throw in, the game is incapable of delivering depth on a significant scale. It is, therefore, a title suited to casual play rather than concerted, weeks-on-end entertainment.

There's absolutely no doubting *Crazy Taxi*'s stellar quality as a coin-op conversion. Like *The House of the Dead 2* and *Zombie Revenge* before it, though, it suffers longevity shortfalls. Restrict play time to bursts and you'll get along fine.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

ROLLCAGE STAGE II

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **SCEE**

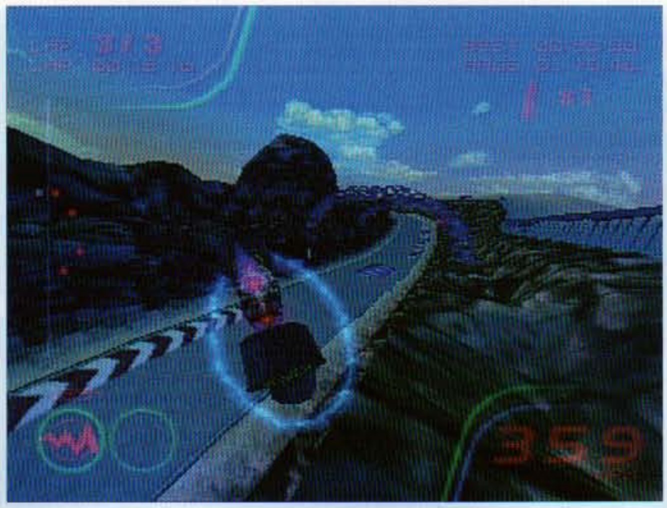
Developer: **ATD**

Price: **£35**

Release: **March 10**







Stage II **has 20 new tracks, with obligatory alternate routes, for you to try out the most imaginative and impressive ways of defying Newton's principles**



The range of weapons has increased, and these can be powered up by repeatedly picking up the same icon (not easy when doing 400mph)

Had ATD been happy to knock up a marginally improved sequel to its likeable 1999 futuristic racer, it's unlikely you'd read about it here.

But *Rollcage Stage II* is a wonderfully complete experience, offering substantially more than its predecessor. The adrenaline-friendly concept of the original remains, while the play mechanics have been refined to significantly reduce potentially frustrating situations. Disorientation can still occur, though not as often, and one button press gets you facing the right way should you require it.

New features are myriad, and five leagues await you, offering two play modes: the pure racing nature found in the original *Rollcage*, and Total racing, which introduces the concept of battling your opponents for points. Your combat skills and finish position then determine your final standings. Both modes follow a three-race structure with entry to a knockout round granted if you're leading the points table by the end of the third race. Winning this fourth race allows progression on to the next league but for that to happen you must survive four laps without being eliminated from the race; whoever is bringing up the rear every time the line is crossed is thrown out. You'll know when you're headed for retirement-ville because your OSD helpfully turns red and you then either scramble to overtake the guy in front or gracefully accept defeat. The moments of intense desperation that follow the sudden realisation that you're in last place offer genuine thrills.

The usual arcade and time attack deals are also on offer. This time, though, you'll notice a training mode offering a series of tests *à la GT* to help you get used to the gravity-defying world of *Rollcage* racing. And adding more meat on the game's already fleshy construction is the Scramble option, presenting 25 sky-set, treacherous assault courses in which you must get from A to B within the time allowed without venturing off the edge. It's gratifying stuff.

Stage II wouldn't be the success it is without its splendidly rewarding structure – nearly every triumphant achievement brings about new goodies. Finish first in races and you get access to a new vehicle (the better the car, the more weapons it has), or earn a retry voucher for the knockout run (handy in the higher leagues). Conquering the game's many modes also opens further play options (Survivor and Demolition, for instance), so incentive is ensured.

Throw in a selection of hugely entertaining twoplayer options and other bonus modes and longevity is assured. If futuristic racing games are difficult to pull off convincingly, it seems no one has told ATD.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



Technically, this is as adept as its PlayStation-pushing predecessor

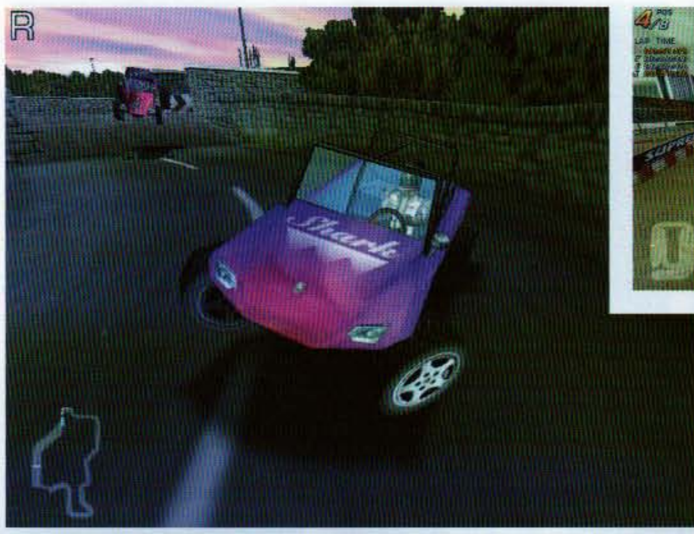




The various twoplayer games (top) provide plenty of diversion, as does the oneplayer Scramble mode (above) in which you attempt to clear hazardous tracks before time runs out

BEETLE CRAZY CUP

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Xpiral**
Price: **£30**
Release: **Out now**







Most things in *BCC*, including opponent AI, are a little rough and ready. Put up with these, though, and you're rewarded with a challenging videogame which should offer occasional moments of old skool-style playability





The simplest of the five categories, Jump mode proves to be one of the most addictive. Expect to spend a lot of time trying to beat records

Though there's nothing about *Beetle Crazy Cup* that could be truly be regarded as astounding videogaming, it has commanded a strange hold over the **Edge** office over the last few weeks.

On the face of it, the graphics are pretty, although hardly likely to put an inordinate strain on today's 3D cards. The agonising speed loss that occurs when your vehicle comes in contact with a barrier is frustrating. And too many cars understeer as if on ice. So this isn't a game that overflows with refinement. But *BCC* does have a couple of hidden aces up its sleeve, the most significant being that it doesn't take itself too seriously, which is relief in itself.

Several displicines are in place: race Beetles (and Beetle-derived cars) on asphalt, American off-roaders on dirt, and beach buggies on a variety of terrains, or take part in a monster truck dexterity challenge, or nitro a racing machine up a ramp to set car-jumping distance records.

Of the game's five racing categories, two (Monster and Jump) could stand alone as separate games, both delivering a brand of old-school values that ensures replayability.

If there's one regret, it's that none of the other categories offer anything quite as wildly removed from typical racing. Granted, each of the Speed, Dirt and Buggy divisions provides singular four-wheeled competitive experiences, but losing one in favour of a more adventurous replacement wouldn't have been traumatic.

BCC also benefits from a tight structure, reflecting its arcade nature. Bypass the Quick Race option and focus instead on Championship and the Beetle Challenge Mode. The former is split into three events of increasing difficulty – which can only be opened once the previous championship is beaten – and consists of a series of races from the Speed, Dirt and Buggy categories.

Meanwhile, the latter is unmistakably the game's core, offering challenges in all five categories. Each one contains five trials to clear. Completing them qualifies you for the World Beetle Cup, featuring a race for every category. That in turn grants access to the Super New Beetle Challenge. Cash (from posting fastest laps, race time and winning) works as a further incentive to work your way through the races, allowing you to buy improved machinery from the 50-odd models available.

A Dreamcast version would undoubtedly guarantee better commercial success, but on the PC this kind of hugely playable, arcade-inspired stuff is hardly run-of-the-mill material. If justice is served, *Beetle Crazy Cup* will carve its own valuable niche.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



The monster truck challenges are easily the trickiest of the five classes. Players lacking in patience and videogame dexterity need not apply

BERSERK





Format: **Dreamcast**

Publisher: **ASCII**

Developer: **Yukes**

Price: **£5,800 (£35)**

Release: **Out now (Japan)**



From open areas to tight confines, *Berserk* superficially encourages players to adapt their fighting style. Nevertheless, the button-bashing remains constant



In some instances, such as during this boss encounter, *Berserk* hurls polygons around with 60fps abandon. If only its gameplay was as slick

While the one-on-one fighting game has evolved in recent years, the scrolling beat 'em up, once a huge genre thanks to the quality of *Golden Axe* and *Double Dragon*, has largely stood still. And *Berserk* makes no great strides in pushing it along.

It is undoubtedly attractive, though. And so it should be, considering Dreamcast's capacity for high resolution, smooth frame rates and lavish textures. Its sets appear solid and, although often spartan in terms of furnishing, they are consistently evocative. This is fortunate, because you often play the role of observer.

Based on Kentaro Miura's popular manga series, *Berserk* spins an ambitious yarn, with a heavy amount of dialogue for an action game. For minutes between fighting sequences it pays homage to its original comic form – although it is possible to skip these on-rails moments.

Trouble is, *Berserk*'s brawls rarely border on the spectacular or varied. Its fusion of story and gameplay is no more than a marriage of convenience, weakly joined by the mutual use of Miura-san's characters. If these cinematic asides are intended to build tension and establish emphasis for spectacular, varied combat exchange, they fail.

Central protagonist Guts has an enormous broadsword to bludgeon familiar foes. Your dim assailants are easily dispatched with simple combos, and their habit of swarming towards your swinging blade means that the included block button is largely redundant. In an attempt to enliven fights by introducing a strategy, Guts can only perform combos with his blade in open areas. If he strikes a wall or suchlike mid-swing, he pauses, leaving himself vulnerable to attack. The alternative is to use his fists and a variety of projectile weaponry.

But the collision detection in *Berserk* is dismal. Enemies half submerge themselves into walls with alarming regularity and Guts barely needs to touch his opponents to land a blow. After a set number of hits, Guts fulfils the titular description and enters a powered-up mode, making him far faster and stronger. Only the most inept of players will fail to clear a particular area before this status expires.

With little in the way of balance, and a bare trace of innovation, *Berserk*'s combat is repetitive. Its well-crafted aesthetics do lend credibility, yet the design of action sequences appears lazy and uninspired. Worst of all, the game lacks a multiplayer mode. Surely this has to be a prerequisite for a game of this type.

Like *Soul Fighter*, *Berserk*'s graceless execution is its undoing. That Eidos has picked it up for western release is shocking.

Edge rating:

Three out of ten



Fans of Miura-san's work will find the lengthy cinematic asides a delight. But only those with a firm grasp of Japanese will truly appreciate it

MARIO PARTY 2

Format: **Nintendo 64**

Publisher: **Nintendo**

Developer: **HudsonSoft**

Price: **¥5,800 (£35)**

Release: **Out now (Japan); May (UK)**













Familiar *Mario Party* elements, such as the chaos caused by Bowser's appearances, sit comfortably alongside fresh fixtures. Six twoplayer-only games are incorporated into a batch of near-faultless new mini-games





Rather than jettison the mini-games found in the original, Hudson has salvaged the best for *Mario Party 2* – these two simple but superb games included

Multiplayer gaming so often refers to individuals doing battle across different cities, countries and continents. It's heartening to see Nintendo and Hudson jointly organising another *Mario Party* – and in doing so getting people together around a single, plastic game box.

The central board game section remains the most turgid, despite attempts to enhance it with all manner of shops, event tiles and mobile scenery. This dice-rolling section can prove involving – mostly when a player gains the opportunity to steal match-winning coins and stars – but an impatience is left hanging in the air for that captivating, end-of-turn mini-game.

And what a joy *Mario Party 2*'s mini-games prove to be. Whether asking you to accurately count wandering Bob-Ombs, skip in time with a burning rope, or tiptoe towards a sleeping Chomp, the sheer range of control systems, graphical styles and victory conditions called upon make each game a truly individual, and highly competitive delight.

Sensibly, Hudson has retained many of the original's most popular levels, but the developer has also reaped rewards by drawing on a wide range of influences for the newer games: elements from titles as diverse as *Pong*, *PilotWings* and *Dance Dance Revolution* are also evident. And little appeal has been lost in transporting these seemingly disparate ideas into the *Mario* universe.

Weighing *Mario Party 2* down, though, is the tiresome need to spend at least 70 minutes on a single game. A range of bonus games aims to placate this, offering a shorter ride with the emphasis on mini-games, but the absence of the option to simply play fewer rounds on the main board is frustrating.

Time spent feasting your eyes upon Mario's vibrant world is invariably a pleasure. Hudson has given the third dimension a meatier role in *Mario Party 2*, stretching as far as a splitscreen, thirdperson tank battle in one mini-game. Its flair, ingenuity and sense of humour, in both 2D and 3D, coupled with Nintendo's most infamous and irresistible characters, make play gleeful and often hilarious.

Its limitations as a oneplayer game aside – never have rooms seemed more empty than during *Mario Party 2* solo play – this is a thoroughly enjoyable console board game. It's proof that blowing up your friends isn't a requirement to having fun. Not when you can watch them being dropped into a bin by a giant metallic mouth instead.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



The trials of a start-up developer: part 20

After co-founding Lionhead Studios with Peter Molyneux, Demis Hassabis set up his own development house, Elixir Studios. In the latest instalment of his exclusive diary, he talks about building that all important mood for *Republic: The Revolution*

Onward spirals

We had a milestone set for the start of February and we couldn't afford to lose any time working towards it.

Game development has always been a chaotic process. In the beginning you had three blokes in a room, all doing a bit of the art, programming and some of the design. They got away with it because they sat next to each other and communication wasn't a problem. The game would only ever be played by gaming enthusiasts who wouldn't mind if the engine was written by an artist, or if the sound was nothing more than a series of minimalist bleeps.

As teams and budgets have got larger, the culture has struggled to keep up. Games are immensely complicated and require strict, less glamorous project management. It's not just a question of efficiency – it's also about preventing bloodshed. Every game's team has three very different and mutually antagonistic components in design, programming and art.

Artists need the designers to have designed the game and the programmers to have finished before they can start their work. Designers would ideally like to know what technology they're going to have before they start designing their game. Programmers need to know exactly what the designers want before they start programming. It's a recipe for handbags at ten paces. And crap games.

But what do you do? You could always sacrifice creativity on the altar of *MS Project*, but that would not be much good either. You're creating a spreadsheet package. You need to leave room for the inevitable changes in the design. We've got a solution at Elixir called the spiral cycle.

Director **Dave Silver** explains: "The way we try to address this problem at Elixir is by using a spiral life cycle for our development. Doing this involves breaking the development cycle down into stages of increasing size and level of completeness. At the end of each phase in the spiral there is an opportunity to adjust the direction of the project. We assess the major remaining risks, and plan out the next phase of development accordingly.

"This way, we can have a full plan for each stage that takes account of all the work that needs to be done. Compromise is also important. It's too easy for artists and programmers to become insular and parochial in their individual approach to work. The attitude becomes 'Well, I've done my bit, it's their fault it isn't done'. I loathe this sort of attitude – if you fail, you fail collectively. If you can encourage each side to see each other as allies you've got a better chance of producing a good game and a happy team."

Over the last few months we've made a lot of progress with the art in *Republic: The Revolution*. Every couple of months we have an art review which results in us throwing away a lot of good work, to maintain consistency in the game's world. In terms of the overall style, we've come a long way from where we were at the start.

Initially, many of the artists were dubious as to the fun factor associated with creating authentic-looking eastern European buildings for two years. We had a long discussion which is still going on. My point was that reality wasn't what we were looking for. Places like Kiev are in reality little more than adverts for foul '60s prefabricated architecture. This is authentic, but is it cool?

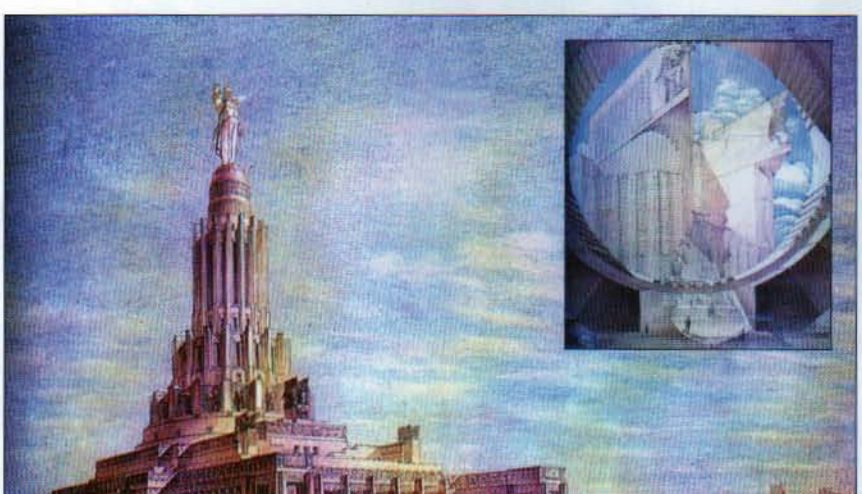
'People's idea of eastern Europe may not correspond to reality. We've discovered plans for monumental communist buildings that were never built, fostering, I hope, the sinister film noir setting the game calls for'

I want cities and towns that reflect the sinister reality of the game – imposing buildings that enforce the belief that the man on the street is a mere ant. We spent some time watching and discussing films where cityscapes have been changed or tweaked to achieve such an effect. Starting with Fritz Lang's seminal 'Metropolis', we looked at 'Blade Runner', 'Batman' and 'Seven'. The cities in each film are recognisably based on real places, but have been exaggerated to create an atmosphere conducive to the ideas within the stories.

We also examined pictures of Prague and St Petersburg. People have an idea of eastern Europe that may not correspond to the reality – give them what they want. Even the rundown parts of Novistrana need to look cool in their own way. Miles of concrete monoliths aren't going to look good. We're trying to create a look that's plausible, cool and then realistic, in that order.

It's been a slow process and we've made mistakes (pink flats spring to mind!) but the art is getting better all the time. We've discovered plans for monumental communist buildings that were never built, such as Iofan's Palace of the Soviets (pictured below left). We've placed them in the game thereby fostering, I hope, the sinister film noir setting that the game calls for.

News of *Republic: The Revolution* seems to have ruffled a few feathers and several people have expressed doubts about Tim Clarke's Totality engine. In a creative industry there are many fragile egos. You run the risk of upsetting them if you attract what they deem to be unwarranted attention. It's all very sad – one developer's success is rarely to the detriment of another. This has made us more determined to make the best game we possibly can. From bitter experience I've discovered that there's always a queue of people waiting to take a pop at you, hoping you will fail. There's only one way to answer them – prove them wrong.



The Soviet palace that never made it past planning stage – until *Republic* artists found real life too ugly



Photography: Martin Thompson

DAVID LAU-KEE

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

HIS COMPANY WAS WORKING WITH PLAYSTATION2 DEV KITS BEFORE SOME INDUSTRY TYPES EVEN KNEW THE FORMAT EXISTED. HE FORESEES A FUTURE WHERE 'GAME JOCKEYS' PUSH INTERACTIVE ENTERACTIVE TO THE MASSES. HE WOULDN'T MIND GETTING NEXT TO 'FEISTY YOUNG THINGS'. MEET CRITERION'S MD...

Who had the first PlayStation2 development kit in the UK? Codemasters? Core Design? Some beleaguered backroom programmers at Psygnosis? Think again. As a premier pillar in Sony's ambitious (yet unproven) middleware support plans, Criterion's Renderware was being rewritten for PlayStation2 in early 1999. Staff at Criterion's office in Guildford were keeping the box a secret before other industry insiders even believed it existed. Not bad for a company that some overlooked after 1995 when – like Argonaut – it lost out in a Microsoft feeding frenzy, to fellow Brits RenderMorphics, when the giant came hunting for a 3D API to shoehorn into DirectX.

"After Microsoft hooked up with the RenderMorphics guys, there was a sense of 'My God, what next?'" admits Criterion's managing director **David Lau-Kee**. "But there was also a release. We thought, okay, now we can begin to do our own thing and compete in our way." Judging that it would take Microsoft at least two years to come up with a product, Lau-Kee accelerated the game development side of the company he spearheaded out of a Canon research project in 1991. While Criterion Software continued to develop on Renderware – arguably the world's first consumer-level 3D graphics API – its sister company Criterion Studios was founded to bring 3D games to market.

Today, Criterion is certainly doing its own thing. Some 800 development companies have been beta testing its Renderware 3 API, and Criterion hopes to sell 5,000 licences. That's meaty middleware. Meanwhile, early products such as *Scorched Planet* – a 3D take on *Defender* which required 3D accelerators before the world had them – have given way to funky, playable titles such as Acclaim's *Trick Style*.

"We're probably better placed in terms of the studio side than we've ever been," Lau-Kee says. And with talent like those on the *Trick Style* team, world-leading 3D graphics technology, an inside track on future platforms, and strange visions of the future at his disposal, he might just have a point.

Edge: Is *Trick Style* the first true Criterion Studios game?

David Lau-Kee: I think in terms of some of the elements in it, *Trick Style* is a terrific game. It's not perfect, but show me one that is. The team are now working on what we're calling *Trick Style 2*, although you shouldn't think it's going to be a straight sequel. There are a number of fundamental differences.

Edge: Such as?

DLK: Well, one reason *Trick Style* may not sell ten million units is that it has both the trick element and the racing element. Maybe those don't combine in the fashion they ought to in a mass-market game. Also, I think that the multiplayer element works, but doesn't really bring a whole new dimension to the game.

Edge: Will there be a PlayStation version of *Trick Style*?

DLK: Well, we have a version running on PlayStation2, but that's as much because *Trick Style* has a Renderware engine and we used it as a test case.

Edge: Was it easy to port?

DLK: We had a recognisable version running in about a week.

Edge: It must have been a risky decision to target Dreamcast rather than the original PlayStation.

DLK: You might say it was fortuitous timing in that we were ready to move away from solely developing for PCs. But we never had any doubts about Dreamcast. From first seeing the development kits we thought it was going to be a good machine.

Edge: Did you ever fear it wouldn't be a commercial success?

DLK: No. There was a lot of tittle-tattle that it wasn't going to sell very well. But if you went out and talked to the people on the street who weren't industry insiders, they were excited by it.

Edge: It's probably fair to say *Trick Style* is Criterion's first critically applauded game. Were your first games really technical demos?

DLK: The first games... can I remember those? Maybe I've purged them from my memory! [Laughs] Yeah, it was really just dipping our toes into the games market. The first games were technical exercises. *Scorched Planet* had an industrial-strength networking component, which was like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut! But in terms of a piece of engineering it was wonderful.

Edge: Perhaps you had spent so much time on the cutting edge creating Renderware that you'd had no idea what people at home were using.

DLK: Absolutely. We were building games only for ourselves. I think it's a stage that people with a strong technical background have to go through.

I see it with the new spin-off companies. You've got smart technical people doing some really interesting things, but they have to exorcise this notion that games can be driven by technology. You'll hear them say time and again: 'Oh, it's all about gameplay' but there's more to it than saying those words – it's translating them into muscle.

Edge: What else is in the works?

DLK: We recently released *Suzuki* on Dreamcast. And we have *Deep Fighter*, which is looking dead cool. It will be released around March on Dreamcast. And we've got another game that probably won't be released until 2001.

Edge: You must be one of the most experienced Dreamcast developers outside Japan.

DLK: Yeah, probably. We've got a bunch of other stuff going on with Dreamcast, too. We're not saying a huge amount about this at the moment but we're really intrigued by what Sega has managed to pull off on the online side of things.

Edge: Really? It's been a disaster so far.

DLK: Well, yeah. [Laughs] Let's talk again in six months time! I think there are all sorts of possibilities there, outside the image you might have of a Dreamcast game. If you ask where games are going, people tend to reel out this analogy with the Hollywood blockbuster. There's a huge amount of truth in that, but I also think you'll find there's scope for other styles of game.

Edge: Just like independent cinema?

DLK: Yeah, or TV programmes or TV soaps. Those are tremendously compelling as forms of entertainment but they don't compete with Hollywood. They are a different kind of experience.

Edge: Would it be a mistake to continue to see Criterion primarily as a technology company?

DLK: I think it's now a misapprehension. We've shown the first glimpses of that with *Trick Style*. The stuff you'll see from us in the next couple of years will seal it.

Edge: But won't you always need to create demos for Renderware?

DLK: Yes, of course, and this is why we have a demo team upstairs in the technology division which does just that.

Edge: So the games themselves don't have to use Renderware?

DLK: Absolutely not. The studio guys have completely free reign to choose any technology they like. They can use Renderware or something else.

Edge: And they are all using Renderware at the moment?

DLK: Absolutely. [Laughs] If they want to build their own technology then fine, they can go and do that. And there might be a good reason to. Of course, it would be a very interesting decision for us. That's one of the big benefits of having technology development next to game development. With technology development alone, you can be in your own corner thinking 'this is great' and yet lose sight of the real world.

Edge: Criterion has been using the PlayStation2 hardware for nearly a year. What are your thoughts?

DLK: It's awesome. Quite spectacular.

Edge: Only it seems that after the initial adulation, people are questioning if it's unbalanced, if there's too little RAM and so on.

DLK: Well, is it perfect? Show me a technical person who finds any platform perfect. The cute thing about PlayStation2 is there's so much flexibility thanks to the arcane nature of the architecture. You've got this central CPU, and then there are these vectors units dotted around. Communicating with them is a real art. There are so many tricks you can pull, so many backdoors. It's a coding junky's dream.

Edge: And a dream for somebody selling middleware...

DLK: Absolutely! The more complicated the better as far as I'm concerned.

Edge: How hard is PlayStation2 to program without middleware? You hear silly rumours which claim that Sony made it needlessly complicated so that the firstparty stuff would have first dibs on getting the hang of the hardware.

DLK: I don't think so. You think something is a bit strange, that they didn't have enough time to get this bit right or they skimped a bit on that, but then you talk to them and they've thought it through. They've made some pretty good design trade-offs.

Edge: PlayStation2 is getting linked a lot with broadband networks and the return of set-top boxes. Is that a distraction at this stage?

DLK: It would be a mistake for most developers to put too much effort into it right now. But it would be a bigger mistake not to have someone at the company conceiving what the future will be like.

Things will change, without a doubt. And not just in terms of broadband either, but in terms of the very social arrangement of games. One thing we've been thinking about emerges from unified imaging, bringing together all the different forms of imaging.

Edge: What does that entail?

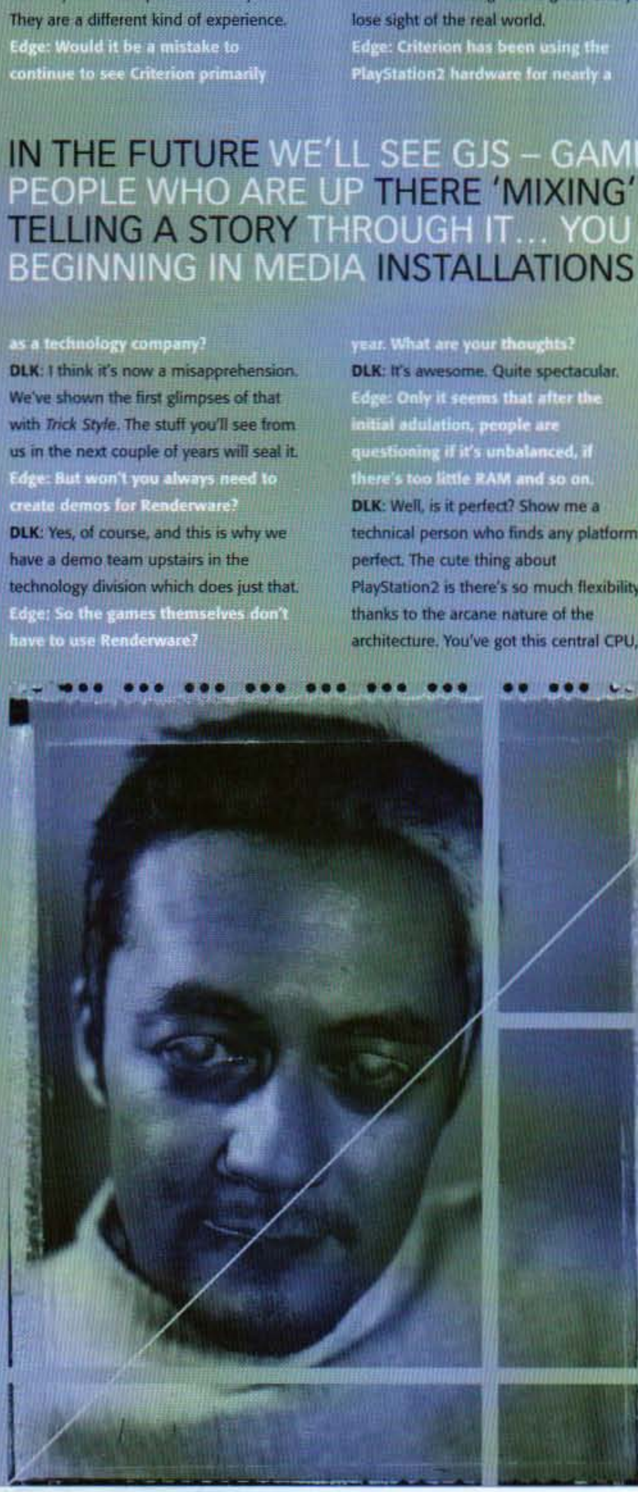
DLK: It all stems from the observation that the intrinsic visual quality of synthesised graphics is approaching that of sampled graphics – synthesised being computer generated and sampled being natural images. Once the visual qualities are the same, you have to ask why you're using a different framework to process them.

There are certain things you can do with video footage that you wouldn't think of doing with 3D graphics – and there are things you do with 3D graphics that you wouldn't conceive as being possible with video.

Edge: What sort of things?

DLK: I think this example brings together

IN THE FUTURE WE'LL SEE GJS – GAME JOCKEYS. PEOPLE WHO ARE UP THERE 'MIXING' THE GAME, TELLING A STORY THROUGH IT... YOU CAN SEE IT BEGINNING IN MEDIA INSTALLATIONS IN CLUBS







the social aspects and the unified imaging aspects. Once you had records, but they have been transformed by the rise of the DJ. The DJ is the person who is conducting this social experience. Records are being played, but it's the DJ's interactivity and creativity that is creating the entertainment experience.

In the future we'll see GJs – game jockeys. People who are up there 'mixing' the game, presenting the game, telling a story through it and interacting with it.

Edge: A bit like a D&D dungeon master?

DLK: Hmm. Think more 'The Matrix'. The quality of the imagery you get in terms of the live action-stuff and the computer-generated stuff. What would it mean to have somebody take images of that quality and mix them in real time and play around with them in real time?

As a social experience, that's what gets me going on future games. I want to experience the euphoria of somebody else co-ordinating and conducting this mass event within the form of a game.

Edge: Do you see this happening through networked games?

DLK: That can happen, but it's a separate thing. You can have a game with one person there and the crowd experiencing it. Another way of doing it might be to have a mass network with lots of people coming together.

Edge: How would people interact with a game in a club environment?

DLK: In all sorts of ways. How does a DJ interact with a clubbing crowd? They're taking feedback from what's going on and they're mixing it accordingly. And there is this huge euphoria when DJs get it right and they move from one particular beat to another beat.

The same thing is going to happen with games. You can see the beginnings in some of the media installations you see in clubs – the stuff Lori Anderson does with performance artwork.

Edge: What if more people wanted to be game creators rather than players?

DLK: In certain games in the future I see no distinction between the two. I think the act of participating means that in some fashion you are creating. You can see that already in multi-user games. You're participating but you're also creating some aspect of the game itself.

Edge: In other words, we'll all be like virtual reality wizards?

DLK: Possibly, but again for me, games of the future are not so much Dungeons & Dragons and wizards. I want to be there, in a club, in this game experience with some feisty young thing next to me. When people talk about emotions in games, I think it's those sorts of things that we're going to see.

Edge: Staying in the realms of potential fantasy, what's your take on X-Box?

DLK: The £2.5bn non-existent device? [Laughs] I've got to say I have no privileged information on X-Box.

Edge: But that's interesting in itself. You're a premier middleware company, you're on Dreamcast and PlayStation2. If X-Box was in an advanced state wouldn't you know about it?

DLK: Yeah. [Pause] What can I say? I don't know whether Microsoft hasn't quite forgiven us yet for the graphics API wars of seven years ago! [Laughs] I think X-Box is going to happen because of what I hear within the industry.

Do I think it should happen? My gut feeling is no. And I also think that if it's Microsoft that's doing it and running it as the Microsoft we know and love today, then it won't be as big a success as it might be. I don't think Microsoft really understands the consumer in the same way that somebody like Sony does.

Edge: But isn't that the point? X-Box is Microsoft grabbing that nettle in the hand and going for that bigger market.

DLK: Sure. I think Bill Gates' problem is he can see that his traditional segment has started to be eradicated because of the decimation of what it means to be a PC. It's beginning to segment. That's fine, but what he needs to do is exploit each segment – servers with *NT*, desktop with *Windows 2000*, the embedded market with *Windows CE*.

Edge: But isn't Microsoft's problem that it's got the second-best solution on every platform?

DLK: Second best is often good enough.

Edge: We've spoken before of every home having a huge server 'under the stairs'. Isn't that at odds with the market segmenting?

DLK: No, no. I've got lots of electrical sockets in my house that I plug things into but I've only got one electricity feed coming in. The server is about centralisation of information coming into the household. It's an information feed and storage area. But aspects of the processing and display and so on are becoming distributed.

Edge: Then does the future belong not to format holders like Sega or Sony, but to products like Renderware that can sit above any of these platforms?

DLK: I think if you can own a format, you will still do incredibly well. The big problem is it's becoming more difficult to retain ownership of a format. The stakes are going up for format holders, just as they're going up for developers and publishers. But the point about the balance shifting is a really interesting one.

If you have various consoles at the bottom level and see middleware sitting above that, then what we're providing at the moment is the 3D part of it. To an extent, we are mediating access to the platform. Without a doubt we're finding that the position we're developing is one that's stronger and more important than a straightforward Renderware play might indicate.

We've been talking about this entertainment device in the future. We don't know what it is, we only know it's not a PC. The convergence is coming from the PC, it's coming from digital television, from game consoles and somewhere in there are mobile phones, too. It all somehow leads towards that device. What we're doing with Renderware is working in every one of those areas – including mobiles.

Edge: But it might be that there's no convergence – rather there's divergence. In that case, developers might still look for a ubiquitous 'language' such as Renderware rather than tackling every platform.

DLK: Yep. The only thing we can say for certain is that technology is driving fundamental changes. You can have images flashing up twice a second... or you can have them flash up 30 times a second and you've got a movie. It's a qualitatively different experience.

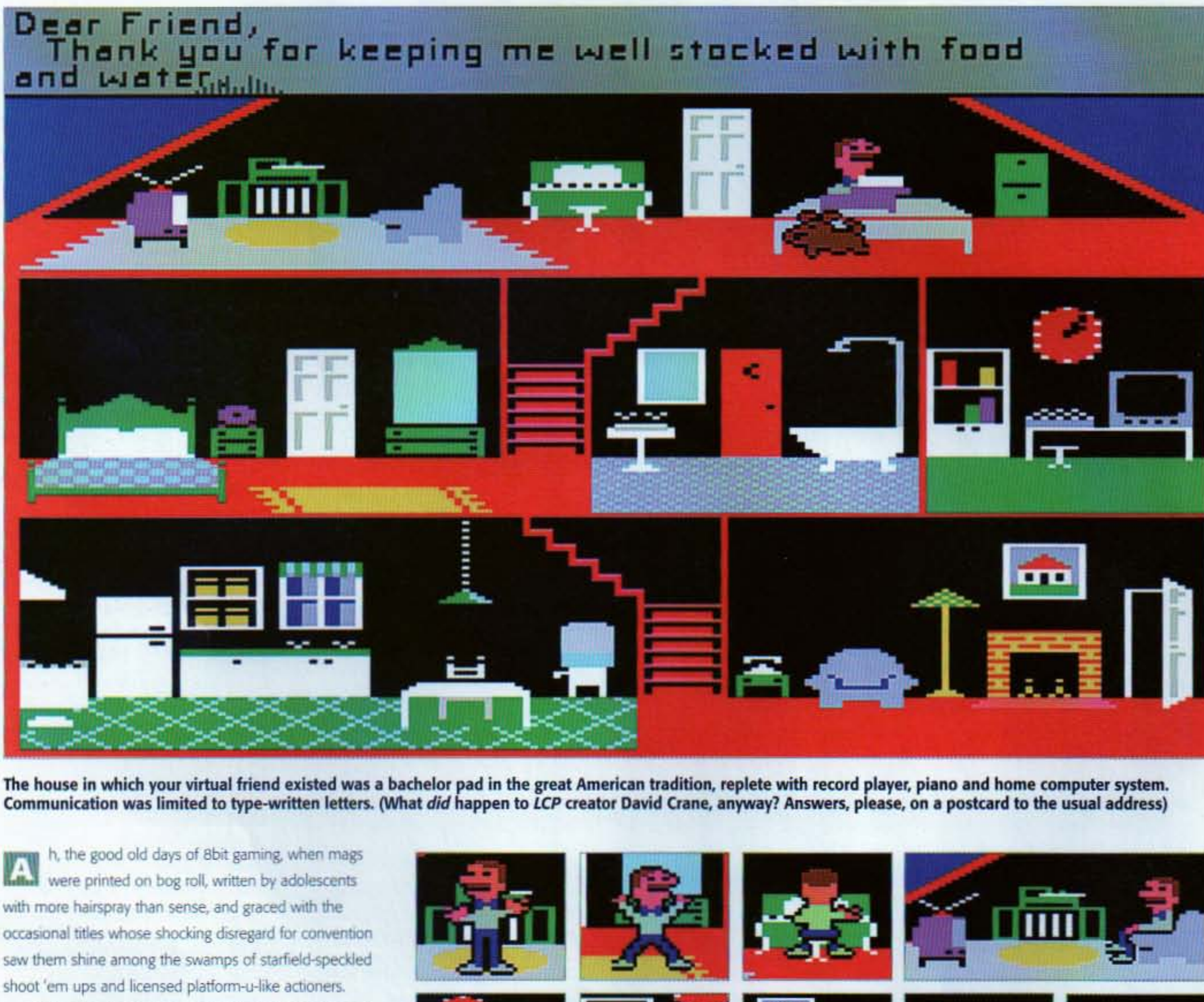
If you take something like PlayStation2, people go on about how it's faster and can do more of this, that and the other. Absolutely, it's a quantitative change. But sometimes a quantitative change leads to an inflection point in qualitative difference. Because it's able to go much faster, that allows you to do something completely different. I think that's what we're going to see.



THE CUTE THING ABOUT PLAYSTATION2 IS THERE'S SO MUCH FLEXIBILITY THANKS TO THE ARCANE NATURE OF THE ARCHITECTURE... THERE ARE SO MANY TRICKS YOU CAN PULL. IT'S A CODING JUNKY'S DREAM

LITTLE COMPUTER PERSON

Will Wright's spectacularly evolved Sims may have moved into the neighbourhood and begun to make a racket (see p66), but **Edge** remembers their founding forefather, who was living around these parts when everything was just fields...



The house in which your virtual friend existed was a bachelor pad in the great American tradition, replete with record player, piano and home computer system. Communication was limited to type-written letters. (What *did* happen to *LCP* creator David Crane, anyway? Answers, please, on a postcard to the usual address)

Ah, the good old days of 8bit gaming, when mags were printed on bog roll, written by adolescents with more hairspray than sense, and graced with the occasional titles whose shocking disregard for convention saw them shine among the swamps of starfield-speckled shoot 'em ups and licensed platform-u-like actioners.

Little Computer Person was such a release. A virtual pet simulator that predated the likes of Tamagotchi by over a decade, the 'game' generated a little house on-screen which rapidly became home to a little man and his little dog. You gave him a name and thereafter it was a matter of experimentation, from sending records over to his place, to writing him a letter, to playing card games.

The life evolving in this digital petri dish was not nearly as clever as it purported to be (few decent simulations are), but here was a plaything with the capability of inspiring curiosity in even the most jaded computer gamer. Legendary, influential stuff.

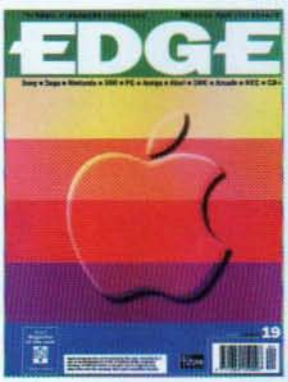


Your little computer person could dance (to music lifted from the likes of *Master Of The Lamps*), exercise, play piano, watch TV, talk on the phone, brush his teeth, cook, eat, drink, and do all manner of other things

Manufacturer: Activision | 1985 | Developer: David Crane | C64/various

EDGEVIEW

The videogames world never stands still, riding the breaking wave of advancing technology. In this regular column Edge puts the industry's progress in perspective with a look at yesteryear's headlines: five years ago this month



Edge issue 18, March 1995



Sega's Tom Kalinske and friend. (Note: one of these individuals would not stay with the brand)

It may seem like something of a contridiction for the words 'the future of interactive entertainment' and 'Apple Computer' to share space on the same **Edge** cover, but issue 18 was celebrating the company's decision to open up its operating system to outfits traditionally seen as competitors. Inside the mag, an eight-page feature chronicled Apple's chequered history, regaling its hardcore gaming readers with the beauty and significance of spreadsheet program *VisiCalc* in the grand scheme of things.

Thank goodness for Sony and its PlayStation, which was by now in the process of romancing UK developers on a wide scale, a fact **Edge** recognised with its report from SCEE's technical workshop, held in London. Guest of honour was **Teruhisa Tokunaka**, then deputy president of SCEI, who expounded on the virtues of Sony's choice of storage medium thus: "PlayStation CD-ROM is like a MacDonald's hamburger: quick, cheap, tasty and easy to get another." (He failed to foresee the other parallel – that, like MacDonald's, the PlayStation would also prove capable of capturing the attention of an entire nation's delinquent youth of a Saturday afternoon.)









Clockwise from top left: an inauspicious start for the Saturn in Japan; the visionaries at Division attempt to show the world what it's been waiting for; Saturn *Panzer Dragoon*; ambitious *Mercenary* update, *Damocles*

Did they really say that?

Sega US chief **Tom Kalinske**: "No matter how great Saturn is, or PlayStation is, or Ultra 64 is, we will outsell them by an enormous amount with 32X"

Did Edge really say that?

'Who would have thought that Apple and IBM would now not only be talking to each other but would have a common business interest?' More importantly, who'd have cared?

Testscreens (and ratings)

Descent (PC; 8/10), Victory Goal (Saturn; 6/10), Return Fire (3DO; 8/10), Dark Forces (PC; 7/10), Kileak The Blood (PlayStation; 6/10), Raiden Project (PlayStation; 6/10), Cybersled (PlayStation; 4/10)

PIXELPERFECT

Every gamer has occasional moments of sparkling excitement, be it the first time *Speedball* booted up, or completing *Sabrewulf*. Here, Ade Carless, senior designer at Infogrames UK, escaped a life of meat thanks to one Obi Wan Kenobi

I was about 16 years old and working as a YTS butcher. Each day was a gruelling stint lasting from 6.30am to 6.30pm. I used to carve meat, lift cuts and serve customers.

During the winter I hardly ever saw daylight – except for the few minutes that it took me to get to the slightly sleazy arcade in Walsall town centre, that is.

Here, I remember, they had a few decent machines – singed *Defenders*, a broken *Tron* and a really loud *Star Wars* stand-up cabinet. The latter was my favourite. For just a single coin I could last out my lunch hour ragging the Empire's Tie Fighters, battling my way through the surface towers and making a frantic run along the trench of the Death Star – again and again.

One day, upon hearing Obi Wan's advice – "Let go" – for the gazillionth time, I decided to take his word for it. I travelled the length of the Death Star trench without squeezing the trigger once.

Then, at the last second, I fired my torpedoes into the vent and made good my escape. I can't remember the exact title of the bonus awarded (I think it was a Force bonus or something), but it changed my perception of the game completely. It seemed so deep!

Soon after this I had secured a bit of casual artist work with Elite Systems, based up the road in Aldridge. It didn't take me long to tell the gaffer in the butcher's shop where to stick his meat, and I've never looked back!

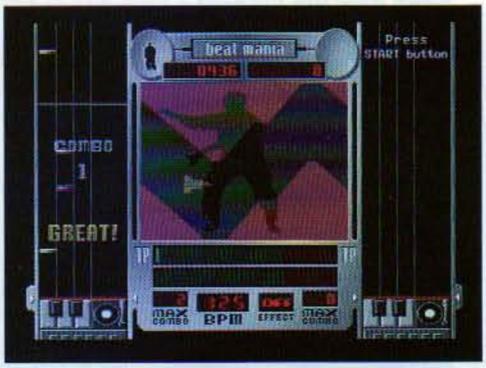




Ade Carless (left), who worked on the likes of *I-War* among many other titles, admits a Force allegiance

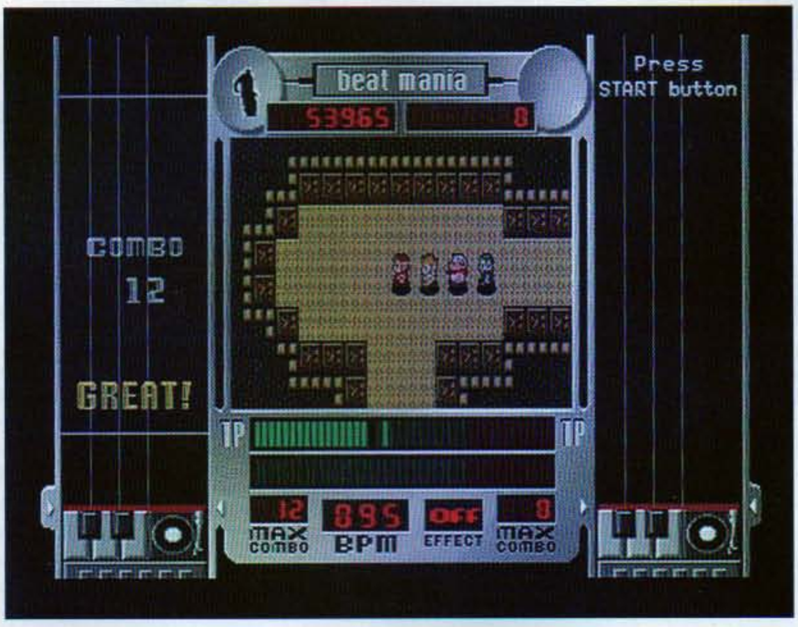
A song for Europe

UK: While Japanese arcade-goers have been busying themselves with all manner of music-led coin-ops over the last few years, from drums to DJ decks to electric guitar sims, Konami's BeMani phenomenon has largely passed western audiences by. That's set to change thanks to Konami Europe's sterling efforts in localising the game that started it all, *Beatmania*. Mindful of the fact that the game's original Japanese score, with its well-intentioned but ultimately lightweight bunch of tracks, would not sit well with Euro audiences, Konami expended around a year's worth of effort in signing up established western dance acts and their most prominent work. Thus, Euro gamers get the opportunity to tap and scratch along to Moloko's 'Sing It Back', Ruff Driverz's anthemic 'Dreaming', and more besides. Best of all, the Euro version comes packaged with a dedicated controller.





Beatmania's dedicated Euro controller in all its plastic glory









The westernised version of *Beatmania* includes funky new self-referential visual motifs (main) and audio accompaniment from the likes of (right column, from top) Les Rhythmes Digitales, Ruff Driverz and Moloko

Konami's BeMani scales up

Japan: As *Beatmania* hits the UK, Japanese arcade-goers are now testing the latest in Konami's preposterously successful BeMani series (sales made the company Japan's top publisher in 1999). Entitled *Keyboardmania*, it's the logical next step for the genre. Step forward, budding Jean Michel Jarres.

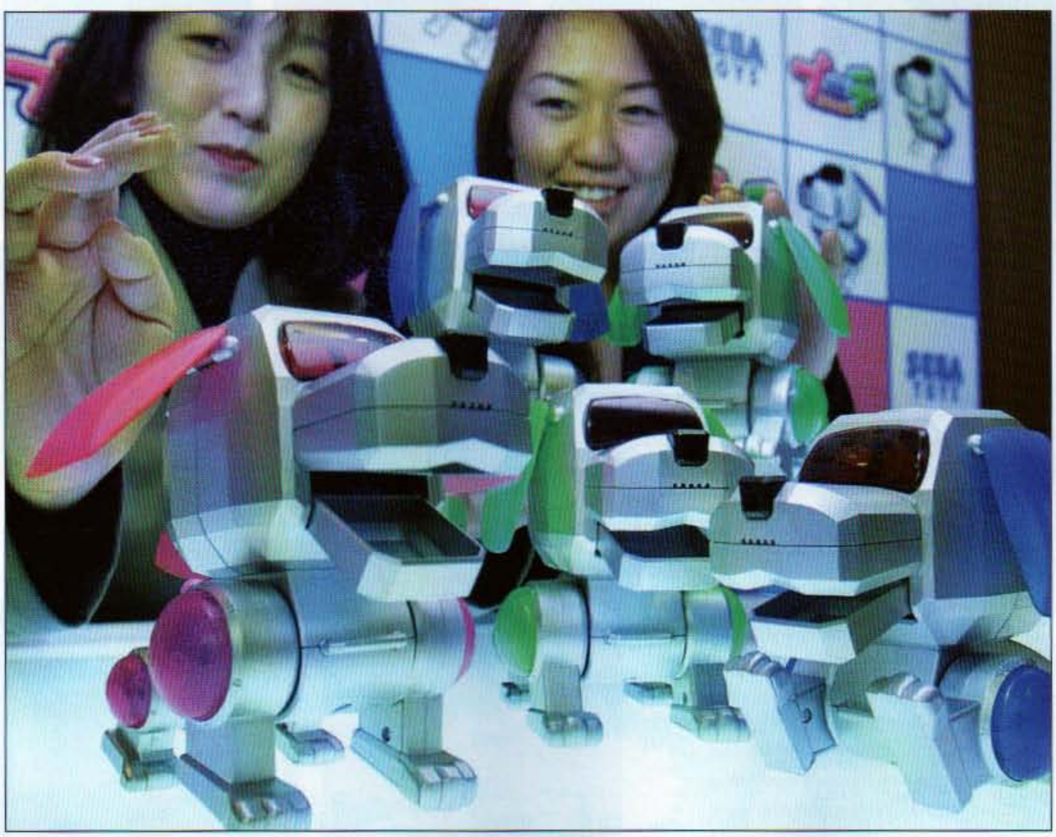


The latest BeMani coin-op is a slinky beast. You don't need any explanation of how it plays, do you?

Poo-Chi Poo-Chi... poo

Japan: In the wake of Aibo, Sony's robotic pet dog beloved of techno-nerds the world over, comes a reply from Sega in the form of Poo-Chi. Retailing in Japan at the equivalent of around £20, Poo-Chi is the mongrel to its rival's Shih Tzu, offering an altogether less comprehensive range of responses to its owner's commands. Though it's capable of recognising signals in the form of light, sound and touch (pat it on the head and heart symbols appear in its electronic eyes), the poor beast can't help looking more 32X than Dreamcast.

Electronic toy company Tiger will be bringing Poo-Chi to the UK in July at around £30



Horror's new point of view

Japan: During experimentation with a demo version of *BioHazard Code: Veronica*, an unusual new viewpoint came to light. Yes, it's now possible to blow away undead freaks from an altogether more satisfying firstperson perspective. Look out for this cynically cribbed element as a bonus mode in the final release.





Brave hearts prepare for battle

UK: The success of 1999's Scottish Computer Games Championship has ensured that this year's event, again to be held in Perth, is ramping up. Sponsored by Electronics Boutique Group, SCGC 2000 will be held on July 28-31. More details closer to the time.



Last year's event (left) featured several categories, the winner of each going on to compete in all disciplines in order to crown the overall champion

Pocket begins to bulge

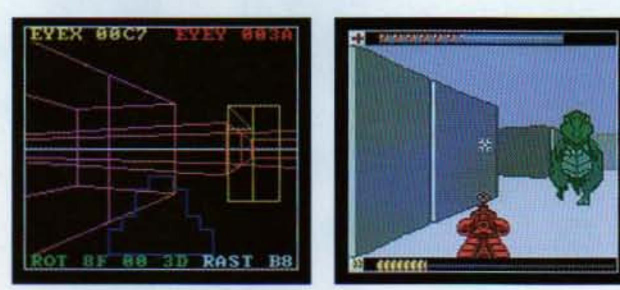
Japan: If someone told you 12 months ago that a new handheld console would shortly be challenging Nintendo's all-conquering Game Boy as the format of choice for developers looking to take proven formulae and squeeze them down into portable form, you may well have laughed. But SNK's Neo-Geo Pocket Color is doing just that, as its latest wave of software attests. Apart from SNK itself, which is doing a fine job in bringing Neo-Geo titles such as *Metal Slug 2*, *Magician Lord* and *Last Blade* to the format, battle game specialist Quest has produced a Pocket conversion of *Ogre Battle*, with UEP Systems' *Cool Boarders* and ESP's *Evolution* also making the journey.

Left to right (by column): *Metal Slug 2*, *Cool Boarders Pocket*, *Last Blade*, *Ogre Battle Densetsu*, and *Evolution*



Handheld gaming enters new dimension

UK: Nintendo fans awaiting the Game Boy Advance in the hope that handheld gaming is about to enter a new dimension need not anticipate any longer, because *Tyrannosaur Tex* proves shows just what the Game Boy Color is capable of when it's tickled in the right places. Yes, it's been a long while coming, but now you can have firstperson shoot 'em up action on the move thanks to Slitherine's game. What do you mean, it looks like *3D Monster Maze*?





Using similar techniques to those that made Sega's Mega Drive handle firstperson 3D, *Tyrannosaurus Tex* gives the Game Boy Color FPS action

Quakers show their oats

US: Like every other honest gamer, **Edge** staffers enjoy the odd session of *Quake III* – nothing too serious, just a couple of hours during lunch and a few more after work. Of course, it's all taken slightly more seriously in the US, where you can't simply play the game, it has to be a lifestyle choice, even if you don't actually have a life to style. And so it was with a sense of foreboding that **Edge** checked out the 'Get Naked For *Quake*' competition on Planetquake. Just like Groucho Marx's assertion that he wouldn't want to join any club that accepted him as a member, surely the logic must be that, with the possible exception of KillCreek, an image of any *Quake* player wishing to get naked would be, by definition, not something anyone would want to see. Still, it's difficult not to admire the devotion, however misplaced.





Yes, gentlemen, now put them away. For the full story, visit www.planetquake.com/features/articles/naked_a.shtml

Gran TuNismo

Since launching the latest version of the Skyline GT-R (the stupidly swift R34 model of which is shown below), Nissan UK reports that it has been astounded by the number of people recognising the car simply from having played *Gran Turismo*. Company reps have allegedly found themselves surrounded in petrol stations, supermarket carparks and motor shows by individuals regaling them with tales of their GT-R related antics in Polyphony's racer. This is the kind of publicity manufacturers kill for – Aston Martin has admitted in the past that the original game did wonders for creating brand awareness in the US – and yet you'd be amazed to find out some refused (or at least made it very difficult) to have their line-ups included in *GT2*.





Press F13 to start

UK: Horror-loving PC/Mac owners who like to tinker with their desktop configurations will no doubt shriek in delight as they explore the various options available in *F13*, a Stephen King-licensed release from Blue Byte. The package allows users to either install one of six screen savers (all of which deliver a multi-branching episodical story), test their knowledge of horror-related trivia, assign a multitude of system sound effects to accompany their computer's actions, or play one of three mini-games. And if that isn't enough, fans should find King's 'Everything's Eventual' novella (previously only available in a US-published magazine), which comes as a bonus, worth the £20 RRP alone. *F13* won't win any awards for high-action gaming, but as an intriguing conceptual hybrid, that's not what it's attempting to deliver.





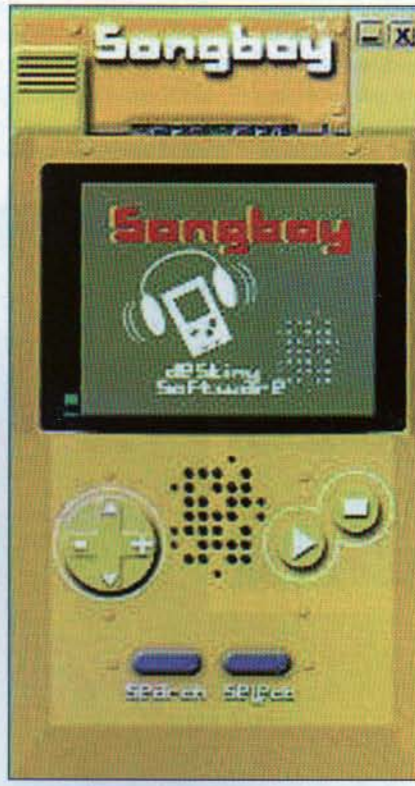


Watch a story unfold in one of the six screensavers offered (above) or opt to squash dangerous skeletons of death

Going for a SongBoy

US: Considering Nintendo's little portable has an audience of 160m ears, it was only a matter of time before someone woke up to the potential of introducing MP3 into the Game Boy mix. Step up the SongBoy. Recently announced at the CES in Chicago, the accessory plugs into the unit's cartridge slot, allowing the handheld to operate as an MP3 player, similar to Diamond's Rio.

But because the SongBoy uses the secure MP3 standard MPE, you will only be able to download music from its dedicated Web site. And while the first 10,000 downloads of a track will be free, a nominal fee will be charged for further downloads. Advertising will scroll across the Game Boy's screen when the player is in use. The screen does allow lyrics and relevant artwork to be downloaded, however. Priced at $99 (£62), the standard version of the SongBoy has 16Mb of memory, enough for around 16 minutes of music. A 32Mb expansion pack will also be available. Both can be ordered at www.SongBoy.com.





The MP3 revolution rides the back of the most successful console ever. Would Nintendo approve?

Sonic shrinkage

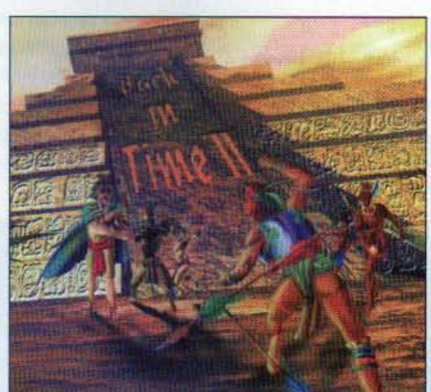
UK: Another month, another bundle of game-related figurines turn up on **Edge**'s doorstep. In this instance, however, the merchandise in question isn't the kind of third-rate tat gamers are accustomed to, with Sonic, Tails and Knuckles lovingly recreated in dinky plastic form. Each character even comes replete with his own gold ring. (**Edge** hasn't worked out what to do with that yet, though.)



Shouting retro, retro, retro

UK: To the layman it may seem like lunacy, but the number of people who cherish old computer game soundtracks as if they were Godly heirlooms stands in the thousands. And, as with many groups of hardcore devotees, their passions are indulged by like-minded individuals who're keen to make a few quid while celebrating the unusual pastime themselves. 'Back In Time II' is the latest product to pander to these whims.

Running at nearly 74 minutes in length, the compilation brings together 15 of the Commodore 64's most beloved slices of game music including the legendary theme from Ocean's *Rambo* (as one half of 'Galway Is God 2000') and a remix of Rob Hubbard's arranged version of the *Sanxion* loading theme, 'Thalamusik', which originally appeared on a covermounted cassette with *Zzap! 64* magazine.



'Back In Time II' can be purchased at www.c64audio.com

Like most compilations, the inclusions are a mixed bag. It's difficult, for instance, not to appreciate the haunting tones of 'Forbidden Forest' and the meandering wibbles of the dancey 'Wizball 2000', but 'Roland's Rat Race' and 'Rydeen' will test the patience of a saint. Promisingly, the next instalment is set to be a more Rob Hubbard-centric affair.

DataStream



Amount of Japanese *Gran Turismo 2* that can be 'finished' because Polyphony Digital removed elements from the game without recalculating percentage totals: **98.6 per cent**
Amount of online sales generated by AOL members between November 25 and Christmas: **$2.5bn**
Number of Dreamcasts produced by Sega each day: **12,500**
Number of Dreamcasts Sega aims to produce daily by June: **35,000**
Amount of money Sega loses per Dreamcast in Japan: ¥2,000 (£11)
Number of copies of *Shenmue Chapter 1* sold in the first week of release: **260,000**
Number of copies of *Sega Rally 2* (Dreamcast's biggest game of 1999) sold in Japan: **290,000**
UK Saturn installed base: **214,460**
UK Dreamcast installed base: **236,438**
Length of time after releasing the *Opposing Force* mission pack at £25 that Havas released a combined pack of *Half-Life*, *Team Fortress Classic* and *Opposing Force* at £40: **nine weeks**
Percentage increase in Red Storm's revenues from 1998 to 1999: **400 per cent**
Size of grant given to Midway by Chicago's local government to stop the company moving into the suburbs: **£1.3m**
Number of units Samsung expects to sell of its Nuon-enhanced Extiva DVD player by the end of 2000: **500,000**
Length of cut-scene footage Sega of America cut from Warp's *D2* because of concerns over sexual violence: **60 seconds**



Eels
Daisies Of The Galaxy
Dreamworks

Considering the Eels' frontman, E, has dealt with the death of his mother and the suicide of his sister, the fact that the most touching song on their new album is 'It's a Motherfucker' should be no great surprise (a beautiful and sparse track, it seems to mark the nadir of his grief). Much of the album is touched by melancholy, but it remains the saddest happy record you'll hear all year.



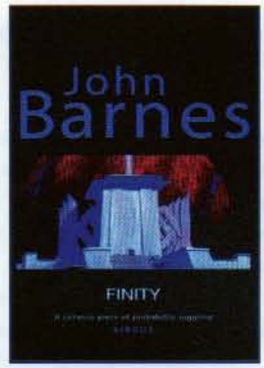
Yo La Tengo
And Nothing Turns Itself Inside Out
Matador

The best-kept secret of American rock, Hoboken's Yo La Tengo are now on their tenth album, with as little chance of world fame as their less-than-slick name suggests. Far from being obscure for its own sake, they push their creativity with a fierceness matched only by Sonic Youth. This album is one of Yo La Tengo's quietest. Hardcore fans will lap it up. Interested newbies would do better to start with one of their mid-'90s releases.



Kid Koala
Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
Ninja Tune

Pushing the power of mixed media, Kid Koala's album comes with a comic booklet and a crude DJ version of *Asteroids*. The music's also a bit of mixture – lazy rhythms rub shoulders with speeded-up vocals and odd scratches, while the finale features manic banjo playing. Reminiscent of early Death in Vegas, it's certainly not breaking any new ground, but while it lasts it's occasionally likeable stuff.



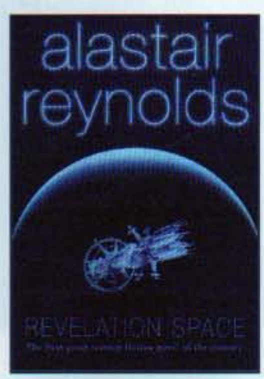
Author: **John Barnes**
Publisher: **Victor Gollancz**
ISBN:**0 575 06891 4**

FINITY

As long as there has been recorded history, the school of 'what if' alternatives has followed a few paces in its wake. It's one of the easiest plot devices available to the uninspired writer: a cheap twist of fact and voila – a whole novel is ripe for the plundering. And, as proved by Robert Harris' 'Fatherland,' a few Nazis seem to guarantee bestseller status.

The latest book from the normally thoughtful John Barnes at first appears to have fallen prey to this curse. Set in 2061, in a world shaped by the Nazi's victory in the Great Reich War of the1950s and the dropping of atomic bombs on the USA, the future is the usual mix of authoritarian control and intelligent machines. It's only when obscure research scientist Lyle Peripart swaps a dead-end job for a mysterious post at the giant ConTech corporation that things start to happen.

His girlfriend sees him in places he physically knows he couldn't have been. Then she saves his life from an assassin with combat skills she can't remember learning. Additional research shows this fragmenting reality is related to no one having had recent contact with anyone living in America. At this point, Barnes remembers he's writing science fiction. Released from the shackles of tediously working through the historical alternative, the writing picks up pace. Mixing parallel universe conjectures with the race to discover whatever happened to America, 'Finity' comes alive and finally finds its own voice.



Author: **Alastair Reynolds**
Publisher: **Victor Gollancz**
ISBN: **0 575 06876 0**

REVELATION SPACE

The cover on this debut novel is underscored by praise from the best British sci-fi writer working at the moment, Stephen Baxter. There are striking parallels. Like Baxter, Reynolds is a trained scientist. He works at the European Space Agency as an astrophysicist. Even more important than the veracity both men bring to their work is their scope of imagination. Baxter's last book, 'Time,' was a fascinating investigation of the scale and depth of the universe. And the foundation of 'Revelation Space' is similar, if contained within a more accessible approach.

Starting in much the same way as Arthur C Clarke's '2001', the book begins as archaeologist Dan Sylveste is about to make a major discovery which will have major implications on the human race. Before he can complete his find, a civil war breaks out and he is captured. An alien warship, equipped with a powerful quantum weapon called the Cache, is also after Sylveste. Its captain has been infected with a killer virus that is slowly driving him to psychosis. Only Sylveste can save his mind.

Behind this action-packed scenario are the more serious thoughts of the scientist – why is the universe so empty? To Reynolds' credit, he manages to keep both aspects of the book in balance. Stirring stuff.







INTERNET
Site: Penny Arcade
URL: www.penny-arcade.com

Videogaming and humour are neither natural nor happy bedfellows, and yet a quick scan of the Net reveals a dedicated bunch of individuals committed to wringing grins out of the pastime whatever the consequences. The most successful of an admittedly limited selection has to be Penny Arcade, a site put together by two American gamefreaks with clearly too much time on their hands (three strips appear per week, for heaven's sake). Best catch it on a good day.

VIEWPOINT

EXPRESS YOURSELF IN **EDGE** – WRITE TO: LETTERS, **EDGE**, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH BA1 2BW (email: edge@futurenet.co.uk)

I was interested to read **Edge**'s comments (Prescreen, **E**79) about how Nintendo and Sega used to reward gamers with secrets and bonuses for playing a bit harder. Nintendo still produces games in this way on the Game Boy Color. The graphics are simpler, but a GBC with *Tetris DX, Mario Deluxe, Zelda DX, R-Type, Conker, Pokémon, Game & Watch Gallery 2* and *Mario Golf* will keep the fussiest casual or hardcore gamer happy for months. Even years.

Not everyone can be bothered with learning a complicated control system and walking around aimlessly for more than two minutes. Perhaps developers should consider making their next game simple and linear rather than another epic.

Andy Scheuber, Stevenage

I would like to question each and every gamer reading this magazine. Do you still like games as much as you used to? Bar a few really outstanding titles recently, such as *Zelda* and *Half-Life*, I find myself less motivated to switch on the PC/console and play.

The vibes that come from most new games now are of a stale, genre-worn nature. I'm not sure that the user is going to hold out for much longer. Dreamcast owners (including myself) cannot honestly say that the machine has brought innovation with its 128bit visuals (*Shenmue* excused for now). The promise of 'emotion engine' technology in PlayStation2 sounds like Sony realises this only too well.

Let's hope that it works, or I for one will have to find another interest. I urge readers to inspire me with a reason for optimism. The only game I still actually enjoy playing is *Tekken 3*. It might sound daft but I now enjoy playing *Pokémon* with my younger siblings more than gaming.

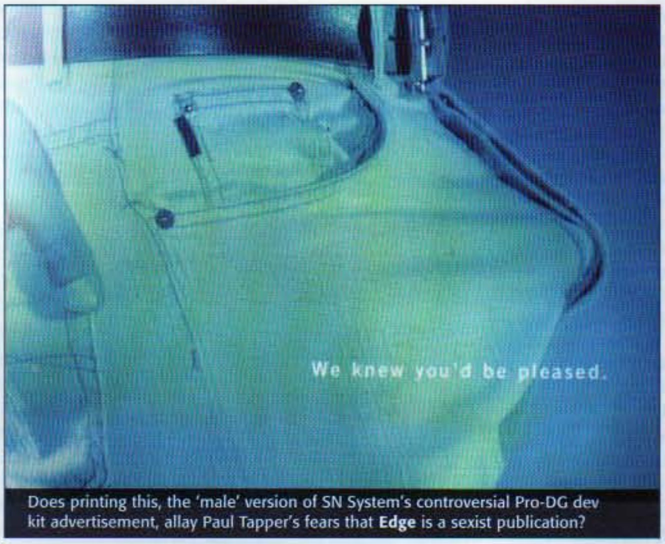
Simon Nicolaou, via email

Is the whole videogaming world just waiting for the next generation age to arrive? I have been into videogames since the 8bit days. Each new machine and the arrival of a new console or computer has been an earth-shattering event.

I walk into Game at the moment and there is no buzz. I find it hard to get excited about PlayStation or N64 games any more. Even the best Dreamcast games are nice, but they aren't blowing me away. I remember the smile on my face the first time I turned on *Super Mario 64*, or *Tomb Raider* and the earth moved, but even with titles like *Soul Calibur* I can't help thinking *Tekken 3* does it better on my 32bit hardware. I can only hope that Dolphin/PS2 returns things to how they should be.

And you can tell that Dreamcast was never going to set the world alight because of one simple rule: a new console needs to blow PC games of the time out of the water. Sony's debut machine did this, as did the first Amigas. Dreamcast doesn't seem to be able to do anything that a well-programmed PIII can manage.

David Walker, via email



Does printing this, the 'male' version of SN System's controversial Pro-DG dev kit advertisement, allay Paul Tapper's fears that **Edge** is a sexist publication?

'Inspire me with a reason for optimism. The only game I still enjoy is ***Tekken 3*. It might sound daft but I enjoy** *Pokémon* with **my younger** siblings more **than gaming'**

If Australian Dreamcast owners can take any consolation, it's that they are not the only owners of a system with its trump card (online connectivity) not fully sorted. Holland's army of gamers who bought into Sega's dream were met with a suspicious coupon rattling around inside the blue box, which made it clear that the console's online facilities would not be functional until well into 2000.

Prospective DC Internet users must now stop by their nearest retailer in March and hand over the coupon in exchange for their Dream Passport GD-ROM – an item which should have been available in the box.

Perhaps Sony's decision to release the PlayStation2 without such things as standard isn't going to be the huge deficiency many people make it out to be.

Dan De Matteis, via email

It has been hard to ignore the constant bickering between so-called casual and hardcore gamers. I am grateful that casual gamers have made the industry as big as it is today.

My message to hardcore gamers is stop moaning that the chart is dominated by *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *FIFA*, happy in the knowledge that you have bought neither, and have spent your cash on unlicensed gems such as *Medal of Honor*.

Games charts are becoming increasingly similar to the music charts. The best songs and games often don't get to number one. Are Westlife really better than John Lennon? Music inspires young girls to buy countless boy band singles,

while games have teenage boys buying every *FIFA* title.

It is a shame that good games don't always get the sales recognition that they deserve, but that's life. Rise above the hype. Do what you supposedly love: play good games.

Lee Hawley, via email

With reference to SN's advert on p36 of **E**80), I think you should cut down on the sexist advertising.

Paul Tapper, email

Edge isn't sexist. Just to prove it, let's balance things up by printing SN's *other* ad (left). Happy now?

At the bottom of 'Videogaming: The Odyssey' (**E**80) was the second system I ever bought – the NES. (The first was the great Colecovision, with games such as *In the Hall of the Mountain King*.)

When the first NES came out in the States, the machine was accompanied by R.O.B. (the robotic 2nd player that never seemed to work but looked cool) and later, the Zapper. Of course, the Zapper wasn't revolutionary, which is why you didn't feature it. But the robot should have been included. Most people would have got a kick out of seeing that old plastic box. I would still love to know what R.O.B. stands for, and whether Europe or the UK got it.

Shannon Clouston, via email

R.O.B. stands for Robotic Operating Buddy. And yes, it did make it to the UK. Where it died on its backside.

Having played the wonderful *GT* for many hours in its Japanese guise, I waited with anticipation for the release of *GT2*. Finally, in January, the postman delivered an American copy. We booted it up and gasped at the great new intro and theme tune and arrived at the slick menu screens. But as the camera jerkily panned across the starting grid and the awful sound banged out we wondered what had gone so horribly wrong.

The crisp update of the original had been replaced by tediously slow framerate and blocky graphics.

The sensation of speed has disappeared, unless playing the time trial option. The best part of *GT* was the close racing against the computer-controlled cars and the feeling of driving down a straight at 150mph. All is not lost, though – the buy-your-own-wheels shop is cool.

Benjamin Burton, via email

Yes, *GT2* is a disappointment. And the moon is made of cheese.

Clever that 'choice of cover' thing – choose your allegiance at the newsagent. Only one small problem. Subscribers. My friend was forced to be evil and I was forced to be good. So we swapped issues.

I am confident that other readers ended up, one way or the other, displaying the alignment they deserve. Oh, and I hope to God that Seth B from Viewpoint a few months ago received an evil cover, for I know him and he is the source of all evil.

Alan P Thorpe, via email

'**My friend was forced** to be evil as I was forced to be good. So we swapped **issues. I bet many readers ended up** displaying the alignment **that they deserved**'

I was surprised to read the letter in **E**80 stating that PC gamers must be 'slightly ignorant or very dedicated'. This in an issue where a PC game was the cover story! I've owned almost every console that's been out since the Atari 2600, barring the Neo-Geo, and that includes handhelds and imports. I find myself somewhat disinterested in the next generation of consoles as immediate must-haves.

I'm a computer animator. For me, consoles are a great way to fill those test render gaps between work periods. I get instant satisfaction gaming with them, but my PC gets the quality after-hours time. I have been playing multiplayer games for years, on the Internet and over LANs. Frankly I can't see how a system that still relies on a NTSC/PAL screen is ever going to beat my hi-res monitor. Even an HDTV monitor will not let you play at 1280x1024, which for strategy games makes a huge difference. Nor is a static box ever going to compete with my constantly evolving one.

Sure, a kitted-out PC is an expensive habit, but so is a Jag.

As for Japanese game designers, I have a huge amount of admiration for Mr Miyamoto, but Molyneux, Carmack, Meier, Roberts, (the admittedly recently fallen) Lord British and the rest of the gangs at Rare, EA, Bullfrog, id and many other non-Japanese companies certainly deserve credit. Anyone who can afford to play on a computer and doesn't is the one who's really missing out.

Chris Subagio, via email

When AOL and Time Warner merged, there was a great outcry of voices singing the multimedia signature tune. Every day, reports on the news draw closer to the world of videogames, which seemed protected from the outside world not so long ago. Something I thought was mine and shared only with a few is now heading for mass market.

I can see the PlayStation2 being in the headlines soon, like *Final Fantasy VII* was two years ago. I can see the broadsheets featuring videogames in their art sections alongside films and music within a few years. Lara Croft is talked about like a film star, the PlayStation comes up in business meetings, and Richard and Judy casually drop Mario into daytime television.

I am torn between the excitement of future creations and a strange longing for the past when videogames weren't something that were dissected and analysed in the mainstream media. I wonder if anyone else feels the same?

Nathan Baseley, via email

But how can anyone not see the value in 'Frag Your Neighbour With Richard And Judy'?

Have I missed something? I like to think that I'm reasonably

well informed about the world of videogames and computer entertainment in general, but I'm starting to think that I must have missed a major news story.

Virtually every letter I read in **Edge** seems to be treating the PlayStation2 (and Sony in general) as if it is the root of all evil or something. Huh? Did Sony commit some major crime while I wasn't looking? Even **Edge** seems to have some sort of problem with this machine, presenting its prediction of Sony's success like an unavoidable but inevitable disaster. One format dominating the whole videogames industry would not be a good thing, but this doesn't mean that a format that is in danger of doing so should be treated in such an unfair manner.

I have owned virtually every major console since the Sega Master System and I also have a PC. Out of all these formats, I think the PlayStation is the one I look on with the most fondness. My N64 has some excellent games, but little overall software. My PC hasn't yet run a single game that I didn't need to chase down a patch for, and I still haven't forgiven Sega for all that money I spent on a Mega CD! So why pick on Sony, the company which has more than delivered on its promises?

Are videogame enthusiasts jealous that their activity is being brought to a much wider audience?

Stephen Wasling,
via email

With the PS2 poised to become videogaming's hardware standard, I was interested to observe that not one of the titles in your '100 Best Games' list was developed by Sony, and that only one of them was published by SCE.

I don't think anyone could make a reasonable case for the inclusion of any piece of Sony software. Sony has been in the business for getting on six years – and what has it contributed to developing original games? Not a great deal. It has established a peerless platform for others to innovate on, but when was the last time you heard Philips congratulated on the content of an album recorded on its CD system? Software is what matters. Sega and Nintendo have been the Beatles and the Stones of gaming.

Edge has stated in the past that there is little money to be made from hardware. That it is merely a platform for the more profitable software division. So why are Sega and Nintendo so keen to keep their fingers in that particular pie? I know that there are considerable royalties to be made from thirdparty licensing, but does that really outweigh the risk and cost of designing, developing and marketing a new piece of hardware?

Sony is moving into new territory with the PS2, and is far better structured to deal with it than its rivals. Maybe it is time for Sega and the big N to drop out of this particular competition. Sega has already indicated that it could take a software-only path in the future. Maybe it's time for Nintendo to follow suit. Both could concentrate on the areas they excel in and watch the royalties roll in.

David Steer,
London



David Steer thinks it's time for Sony's rivals to call it a day and watch PS2 dominate

'Why pick on Sony, which has more than delivered on its **promises? Are videogame enthusiasts jealous** their favoured activity **is being brought** to a wider **audience?'**

Videogames as art? Listening to a record I hadn't played for 10 years I thought how different it sounded, with more depth and more structure, and then I wondered how many games can you go back to and discover new experiences or moods within the existing structure in the way you find with both music and art? It's not the game that's changed but the player. Only a very small number of the top 100 games you presented have the ability to offer such an experience, but I don't think they were designed to anyway, due to the nature of the technology available at the time. However, I see this changing with the introduction of 128bit hardware and better AI routines.

With the ever-increasing turnover of titles across all platforms I wonder how can we, the players, maintain the pace of being at the cutting edge? Personally, I will not be rushing to purchase the next-generation consoles while I still have a large number of half-finished or barely played titles across the 32/64bit platforms and PC. What will I be missing? Apart from the improved graphical presentation of games I don't think there will be many groundbreaking ideas, just more of the same genres. I intend to give my existing games the respect they deserve by not discarding them prematurely (especially those on the N64), and look forward to the next 'next-generation' releases to be thrilled by videogames once again.

Robert Oldfield,
via email

So you're going to forsake Dolphin in favour of the N64. Right. Okay. *Nurse!*

I would like to praise your '100 Best Games' (**E**80). When gaming history started in the late '70s we didn't know any better than *Pong* or *Space Invaders*. A game's age does not necessarily mean it is great. *Pong* in its time was great. Now we find it boring. Some of these games were influential, but not always fun. We may be about to see a next-generation machine, but who knows where we are in the evolution of games? Today's games may be dull compared with what we will play in 15 years' time.

Would the first talking film be in a 100 Best Films list? No. What makes a good game is its gameplay. You might argue that *Tetris* is boring and similar to *Pong*, but one is addictive and the other is not – because *Tetris* has good gameplay.

I would never place *Super Mario Kart* where **Edge** does, but I am pleased to see you rate *Final Fantasy Tactics* that highly.

Mark Philpott, via email

I am glad to see *Defender* and *Tetris* in **Edge**'s '100 Best Games' – but horrified to find the top three spots taken up by N64 games. *GoldenEye* is enjoyable, but do you really think it betters *Half-Life*? It must be hard to name the greatest, but *Zelda* is no patch on *Final Fantasy VII*. What happened to the great classics – *Attic Attack* and *Jet Set Willy* on the spectrum? If the chart is based on playability, not many games have been played more than these two classics.

One of your crew states his greatest game is *Elite* on the Amiga. How dare he take that from the BBC Micro Model B! That will always be known as the BBC Micro's greatest contribution to computer games. And, unlike the failed PC version, it has optional missions and gives you more freedom.

Josh Gardner, via email

Sorry, Beeb fans. That was a disgraceful oversight.

'Edge has laid out its hardcore stall – where development and technical scope outweigh simple gameplay. The high inclusion of *Tetris* and *SFII* merely indulges that game style'

Your Nintendo-kissing '100 Best Games' describes *Exile* as great, but says it was written for the Amiga – wrong! It was a BBC Model B game, later converted to the C64 and Amiga.

Robin Jubber, via email

Of course it appeared on the BBC first. That's no secret. But the list was based on the definitive version in each case.



Daniel Hargreaves believes **Edge**'s inclusion of *Street Fighter II* was a token gesture

A great game is something a lot of people can play and feel a sense of achievement and enjoyment from. *Tetris* and *Street Fighter II* rate favourably in this definition. The most important factor is accessibility. *Tetris* is simplicity itself. *Street Fighter II*, though taking time to gain competence, gives everyone a favourite character. Even a novice could beat a pro unfamiliar with his or her technique. There is no doubting the genius of *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, but it does not encourage participation on a communal level. And for all its immersiveness, it remains a oneplayer experience and demands enormous perseverance.

Edge has laid out out its hardcore stall – where development and technical scope outweigh simple gameplay. The high inclusion of *Tetris* and *SFII* merely indulges the type of gaming these titles represent – like an Etonian attending a Millwall football match as a bit of cultural tourism. Its admiration really lies with intellectual genius, such as Miyamoto, who produces superb yet elitist experiences for those with sufficient patience and pedigree.

Daniel Hargreaves, via email

You're quite welcome to visit the **Edge** office and indulge in a spot of *Tetris* and *Street Fighter II* against the team. Then we'll see who's the 'cultural tourist'.

The '100 Best Games' was a fantastic read, but I was in shock that no *Championship Manager* games made it in. I know many people like to think of it as simply a well-dressed spreadsheet, but it is the only series of games that has kept me hooked at times when I should have been asleep.

Also, why did *Elite* only come in at 63? Looking at what is below it, (*The Need For Speed*) you can see how misplaced this absolute classic is. The latter is an accomplished title but I am sure Electronic Arts would admit that *Elite* has had more influence on its almost undefined genre than the 3DO game has on the racing genre. I was pleased to see *Death Tanks* in there, though. That is possibly one of the best multiplayer experiences.

Mat Thomas, via email

Football management games? Just feel fortunate that **Edge**'s editor's vote for *Brian Clough's Football Fortunes* was shouted down.

Thank you for not including the two most hyped computer games of all time, *Myst* and *Riven*, in the '100 Best Games'. My favourite mag is written by sensible people.

James A Jack,
Amsterdam

Fools! No mention anywhere in your '100 Best Games' of SquareSoft's finest game, *Chrono Trigger*. This game (I'm talking about the SNES original) singlehandedly whoops the ass of the entire *Final Fantasy* series. *Half-Life* took me five days, two stuck on the same level due to a bug. I spent three months on *Chrono Trigger*.

Directhex,
via email

It's arse, not ass.

Your '100 Best Games' overlooks the scrolling beat 'em up genre. Three outstanding exponents spring to mind – *Final Fight, Double Dragon,* and *Streets of Rage 2*. Each one features perfect controls, balanced gameplay and an equally brilliant one or twoplayer mode. The punches and kicks are totally convincing.

Playing the sequels to the latter two (playing *Streets of Rage 3* has possibly been my biggest gaming anticlimax to date) or more recent examples of the genre only emphasise how good these games are. There are few gaming experiences to match completing *Streets of Rage 2* on the hardest setting with Max – its relentless bodycount is probably only surpassed by *Doom*. Was this genre or these games considered?

Andrew Haigh,
via email

Absolutely. But when push came to shove, nostalgia was not allowed to rule over anything else.

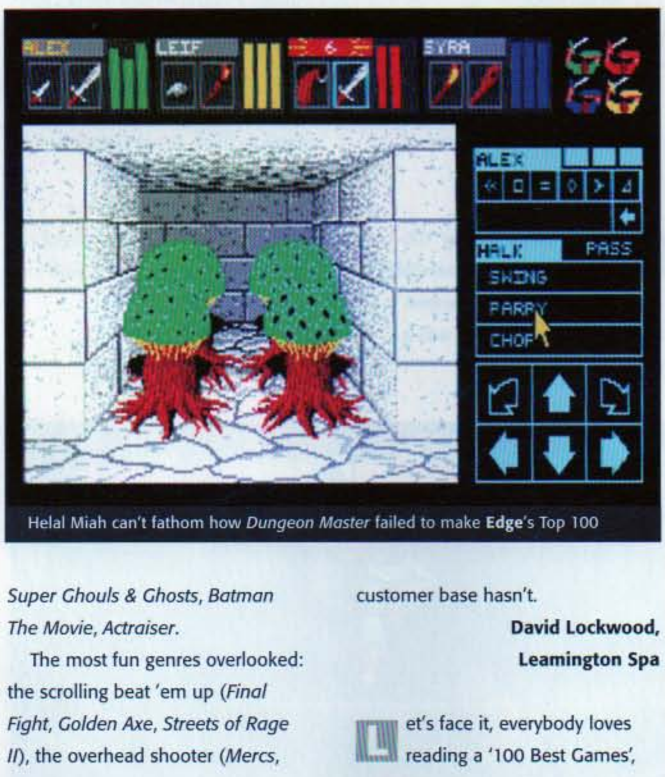
Some glaring omissions in your '100 Best Games': *IK+, UN Squadron, Revenge of Shinobi* – some of the most beautiful and balanced games created. Forgotten gems: *Batman Returns, Hellfire, Super Ghouls & Ghosts, Batman The Movie, Actraiser*.

The most fun genres overlooked: the scrolling beat 'em up (*Final Fight, Golden Axe, Streets of Rage II*), the overhead shooter (*Mercs, Dogs of War*). Most overrated genre: boring old twitch games – *Asteroids, Robotron, Bubble Bobble, Super Pang*. Fun for five minutes. *Tempest, Galaga* and *Defender* last longer.

Marcus Koivula,
Finland

A '100 Best Games' should have a Jordan Mechner design in it. *Karateka* aside, if *Tomb Raider* makes the cut, then *Prince of Persia* must. The real omission is his beautiful alternative to 3D polys, *The Last Express*. It has failed commercially because Mechner has grown up and the customer base hasn't.

David Lockwood,
Leamington Spa



Helal Miah can't fathom how *Dungeon Master* failed to make **Edge**'s Top 100

'Let's face it, everybody loves reading a '100 Best Games' but nobody agrees **with them – a wise man once said,** "Opinions **are like** arseholes – everybody's **got one"'**

Let's face it, everybody loves reading a '100 Best Games', but nobody agrees with them – a wise man once said, "Opinions are like arseholes – everybody's got one." I'd agree with nearly everything in the chart. As an old C64 owner it was a pleasure to see *Paradroid* – even my old man used to spend hours on this while I was busy doing homework. Did *Carrier Command* (Amiga/ST) come into consideration at all?

MR,
via email

Yes – like so many games, it was hovering just outside the 100. Maybe **Edge**'s list should extend to 200 next time. Actually, maybe not.

My main gripe is the exclusion of the 16bit-era *Dungeon Master* (on the Amiga and ST) in your '100 Best Games'. I have yet to see a spell-casting system as innovative. Its puzzles, the huge red dragon, and being able to control the difficulty by taking on one character instead of the usual four are all absorbing. How could you forget the shrieking mummies?

In three years, there has not been an issue of **Edge** I have not enjoyed. You are the *Dungeon Master* of computer gaming magazines.

Helal Miah,
via email

Where was *Mortal Kombat* in your list? I admit, it was hardly a masterpiece, and I can think of other defining moments in videogaming history, but I can't think of one piece of software more important given the ever-enduring 'violence in videogames' debate. It virtually set it all ablaze. Oh, and the revolutionary digitised sprites did realistically recreate a gore-hungry, nine-foot tall, four-armed ogre to near perfection.

Realism in computer games? I can't think of a better example than *Mortal Kombat*.

Andrew Somerville,
via email

Please say this is a joke. Please.

PS2

It's what the world has been waiting for. But has all the hype been worth it? Or are Sony's promises of emotional complexity and previously unexplored gaming experiences ultimately empty? Find out next month, when **Edge** presents a 24-page dedicated PlayStation2 software supplement, giving hands-on reports of 20 of the first wave of next-generation videogames direct from Tokyo.



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